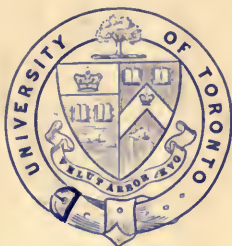




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LEIGH HUNT





Leigh Hunt.

LEIGH HUNT

BY

R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

"Nothing in this world is useless which can dispel a single cloud from human life, or add a single smile to a human face."



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PREFACE

LEIGH HUNT'S character is reflected in everything he wrote, but for the record of facts we must study, often in vain, the *Autobiography*—surely the most unmethodical work of its class ever published, though one of the most delightful—and the two volumes of *Correspondence*, edited by Thornton Hunt in 1862. Other letters may be found in Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke's *Recollections of Writers*, in the *St. James' Magazine*, vols. xxxiv. and xxxv., in *Temple Bar*, June, 1876, and in the *Athenæum*, July 7, 1883; while notices of Hunt abound in the memoirs and letters of his contemporaries. A most careful, but not entirely sympathetic, *Life of Leigh Hunt* was published by Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse in the "Great Writers" series, 1893, where for the first time this scattered material has been so collected and arranged as to form a most useful book of reference. Mr. Alexander Ireland's invaluable *List of the Writings of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt* is a recognised text-book.

In the preparation of the following pages I have also made use of some personal impressions and details of private information most kindly entrusted

to me a few years since (when I was editing *Essays and Poems of Leigh Hunt*—Temple Library, 1891) by Mr. Walter Leigh Hunt, the poet's grandson, Mr. Alexander Ireland, and Mr. C. W. Reynell. Less than two weeks before his death, if the reminiscence be permitted, I had the privilege of discussing Hunt's character and genius with Mr. J. Dykes Campbell, most generous counsellor to all students of literature, who then showed me the manuscript of *The Keepsake*, 1828, from which he had identified Hunt's contributions to that work.

The extremely interesting "attempt of the author to estimate his own character," p. 136, *seq.*, was discovered by Mr. Dykes Campbell "in a volume of pamphlets, etc., bound up by John Forster, and now in his collection at South Kensington," and reprinted by him in the *Athenæum*, March 25, 1893. The original is "a quarto half-sheet, apparently printed to match with the first edition of *Lord Byron and his Contemporaries*."

The frontispiece is from the unfinished portrait of Leigh Hunt, undoubtedly the best ever taken, by Samuel Lawrence, 1837—now in the possession of Mr. Walter Leigh Hunt, who has kindly allowed it to be again reproduced, and who also lent the letter, from which the characteristic signature has been taken, written—he believes—in 1850 or 1851.

R. B. J.

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LEIGH HUNT.

I.—BIOGRAPHY.

LEIGH HUNT was undoubtedly, by character and descent, an exotic on English soil; neither his virtues nor his vices conformed to the national type. He never realised the British gentleman's conception of financial responsibility, or his correct indifference to the bankrupts in morals or business. Without insisting upon an ancestry of "Tory cavaliers" and "Irish kings," or accepting too implicitly his records of the progenitors, "who, on [the mother's] side, seem all sailors and rough subjects, with a mitigation (on the female part) of Quakerism, as on the father's side they are all creoles and claret drinkers, very polite and clerical," we may easily recognise in Leigh Hunt the tropical blood and sunny nature of the creole, tempered and strengthened by the gentle seriousness of the Quaker.

In his own parents the contrasting elements were almost crudely typified. His father, the Rev. Isaac Hunt, was "fair and handsome, with delicate features, a small aquiline nose, and blue eyes. To a graceful ad-

dress he joined a remarkably fine voice, which he modulated with great effect." His future wife and another young lady fell in love with him "when he spoke the farewell oration on leaving College" at Philadelphia, and his wooing was conducted by poetical readings. He had been a spoilt child, and, in spite of many buffetings, never ceased to expect kind treatment from the world. He began life as a lawyer, but lost his position by espousing the British cause during the Revolution, and had to fly to England, where he became a clergyman. In the pulpit his theatrical mannerisms were more popular than remunerative, and his chances of promotion were ruined by imprudent frankness to dignitaries, laxity in doctrine, zeal for inconvenient acts of justice, and a certain degree of after-dinner joviality, very charming to his friends, but scarcely becoming the cloth. "He grew deeply acquainted with prisons, and began to lose his graces and (from failure with creditors) his good name. He became irritable with conscious error, and almost took hope out of the heart that loved him, and was too often glad to escape out of its society. Yet such an art had he of making his home comfortable when he chose, and of settling himself to the most tranquil pleasures, that if she could have ceased to look forward about her children, I believe, with all his defects, those evenings would have brought unmingled satisfaction to her when, after brightening the fire and bringing out the coffee, my mother knew that her husband was going to read Saurin or Barrow to her, with his fine voice and unequivocal enjoyment.

“We thus struggled on between quiet and disturbance, between placid readings and frightful knocks at the door, and sickness and calamity, and hope, which hardly ever forsook us.”

The mother, also a native of America, was little fitted for such anxieties, though she supported them with a noble courage. “She had been a brunette with fine eyes, a tall, lady-like person, and hair blacker than is seen of English growth. She had no accomplishments but the two best of all, a love of Nature and of books. She was diffident of her personal merit, but had great energy of principle.” She possessed the inconvenient grace of sensibility, and a love of beautiful things that must frequently have starved for want of nourishment; but her ardent and fearless conception of duty prevented these qualities from weakening her mind. Her anxious temperament and depressed spirits made her children unduly sensitive, but it was not from their father that they “inherited the power of making sacrifices for the sake of a principle.” Her influence, at least on Leigh Hunt, was evidently strong, and he always speaks of her with peculiar gentleness and affection.

It is a striking and pathetic passage in which he sums up his childish impressions of the two:—“Indeed, as I do not remember to have seen my mother smile except in sorrowful tenderness, so my father’s shouts of laughter are now ringing in my ears.”

To this strangely-assorted couple was born on the 19th of October, 1784, James Henry Leigh Hunt, the youngest of a large family. “I was cradled, not only in

the lap of Nature, which I love, but in the midst of the truly English scenery which I love beyond all other. Middlesex, in general, is a scene of trees and meadows, of greenery and nestling cottages ; and Southgate is a prime specimen of Middlesex. It is a place lying out of the way of innovation, therefore it has the pure sweet air of antiquity about it." He was named after a Mr. James Henry Leigh, nephew to the Earl of Chandos, for the charge of whose education the Rev. Isaac had settled in Southgate, but his own associations with the place must have been formed in later life, as he was under two years of age when the family removed to London.

His earliest recollections, indeed, were of the King's Bench prison and its motley throng of inmates, curiously mingling with others of pleasant musical evenings when the handsome dark-eyed child stood by the harpsichord, singing, "Alone, by the light of the moon," or "Dans votre lit," to the proud parents, who seem to have combined to spoil him to the best of their abilities. His character throughout life was one that answered to kindness, and the extreme delicacy of his constitution had naturally softened the hand of authority.

His removal to Christ's Hospital, at the age of eight, must have been something of a shock, but he afterwards derived considerable enjoyment from the vitality of school life, though he remained to some extent apart from his fellows. He had already acquired the habit of keen observation, which brings its own reward, and the joys of boyish romantic friendship were his :—"If ever I tasted a disembodied transport on earth, it was in those

friendships which I entertained at school before I dreamt of any maturer feelings. I shall never forget the impression it first made on me. I loved my friend for his gentleness, his candour, his truth. . . . I doubt whether he ever had a conception of a tithe of the regard and respect I entertained for him ; and I smile to think of the perplexity (though he never showed it) which he probably felt sometimes at my enthusiastic expressions ; for I thought him a kind of angel. . . . With the other boys I played antics, and rioted in fantastic jests ; but in his society, or whenever I thought of him, I fell into a kind of Sabbath state of bliss ; and I am sure I could have died for him." There is little wonder that the lad "gained, at an early period of boyhood, the reputation of a romantic enthusiast, whose daring on behalf of a friend or a good cause nothing could put down." He was clearly not wanting in pluck when any act of tyranny excited his indignation or threatened his independence, but the fight itself was repugnant to his nature, then as in after life. He was well grounded in the classics, but his pleasure in reading, though abnormally developed, was confined to English literature and, almost entirely, to the poets. Cooke's edition was then coming out. "How I loved those little sixpenny numbers containing whole poets ! I doted on their size ; I doted on their type, on their ornaments, on their wrappers containing lists of other poets, and on the engravings by Kirk. I bought them over and over again, and used to get up select sets, which disappeared like buttered crumpets, for I could resist neither giving them away nor possessing them."

Spenser, Thomson, Collins, and Gray were his favourites. Other delights were experienced in Tooke's *Pantheon*, with the editor's theology disregarded, Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, Spence's *Polymetis* and the *Arabian Nights*. "Pope I admired more than loved; Milton was above me; and the only play of Shakespeare's with which I was conversant was *Hamlet*, of which I had a delighted awe. . . . *Hudibras* I remember reading through at one desperate plunge, while I lay incapable of moving with two scalded legs." Novels from a circulating library were also devoured.

The Correspondence contains a list of books, read at a still earlier age, including *Paradise Lost*, "chiefly admired for the cuts," *Seven Champions of Christendom*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a quarto volume of fairy tales, with a story about "an old queen who wished to exchange ages with a young maiden." Then, as ever, his criticisms were subjective and sentimental, for his optimistic spirit refused to imagine Adam and Eve beyond the gates of Paradise, or Rasselas outside the Happy Valley.

School-life was further varied by "evenings out," of which Leigh Hunt records in particular his visits to the house of Mr. West the artist, where his mother "used to point out to him the subjects relating to liberty and patriotism and the domestic affections"; to that of Mr. Godfréy Thornton, where "there was music, and a family brimful of hospitality and good-nature"; and to the luxurious home of his West Indian aunt, Mrs. Dayrell, who petted him, and supplemented the family

fortunes. He "then took every beauty for an Arcadian, and every brook for a fairy stream." He writes of a lovely country maiden "standing in the water with bare legs, washing some linen," as "one of his poetical visions realised," and of his boyish devotion to Fanny Dayrell; declares that he would have fallen in love with Almeria Thornton had he been old enough, and refers to a schoolfellow's sister as his "second love." He was not yet fifteen, but, as he himself remarks, "he had read Tooke's *Pantheon*, and came of a precocious race," Moreover, "his friendship was greater than his love. . . . Three-fourths of his heart was devoted to friendship; the rest was a vague dream of beauty, and female cousins, and nymphs, and green fields, and a feeling which, though of a warm nature, was full of fear and respect."

Like Charles Lamb, he left Christ's Hospital before becoming a Grecian, because he had a hesitation in his speech, and was not designed for the Church. "So I put on my coat and waistcoat, and, what was stranger, my hat. . . . I had now a vague sense of worldly trouble, and of a great and serious change in my condition; besides which, I had to quit my old cloisters, and my playmates, and long habits of all sorts; so that what was a very happy moment to schoolboys in general was to me one of the most painful in my life. I surprised my schoolfellows and the master with the melancholy of my tears. I took leave of my books, of my friends, of my seat in the grammar-school, of my good-hearted nurse and her daughter, of my bed, of the cloisters, and of the

very pump out of which I had taken so many delicious draughts, as if I should never see them again, though I meant to come every day. The fatal hat was put on; my father was come to fetch me.

“ ‘ We, hand in hand, with strange new steps and slow,
Through Holborn took our meditative way.’ ”

Already Leigh Hunt had some practice in writing poetry, and “for some time after he left school he did nothing but visit his schoolfellows, haunt the bookstalls, and write verses.” Some of his verses were printed in an interesting volume, doubtless edited by an enterprising schoolmaster: *The Juvenile Library, including a Complete Course of Instruction on Every Subject . . . with Prize Productions of Young Students, and a Monthly Distribution of Prizes, value Fifteen Guineas and upwards. Price 6s. 6d. in boards. 1800.* Among the young students are T. L. Peacock, aged 14, who got the eleventh prize for an answer to the question, “Is history or biography the more improving study?” Hunt taking the fourth; Thomas (de) Quincey, aged 15, who secured a third prize (under Hunt’s first ¹) for a translation from Horace, and a seventh for a translation of Tully, the second being given to C. S. Edgworth of Edgworthstown; Isaac Taylor; W. J. Fox; and Kirk White. The editor also printed Leigh Hunt’s *Retirement; or, The Golden Mean, a Political Essay*, and his *Ode to Truth*, giving “great and particular commendation” to his essay “on industry.”

¹ De Quincey’s translation is generally considered the best.

The prize translation of Horace is accompanied by an extremely characteristic letter :—

“GENTLEMEN,—I herewith transmit you my unassisted translation of the before-mentioned passage from Horace, *the success of which my warmest wishes must naturally attend*. If its freedom and diffusiveness are contrary to the design you hold out in proposing a *translation*, I must beg leave to apologise for it (the only manner in which I believe it is possible) by referring to the observation which the ingenious Mr. Mickle has made in his preface to his *Luciad*, that when we attempt a close and literal translation of a poet, it is impossible to preserve the poetical and harmonious beauties of the original, which brings to my mind an assertion of M. de Voltaire, in which he very aptly observes, when speaking of a bad or good translation, ‘The letter, it may be truly said, killeth; but the spirit giveth life.’

“I am, Gentlemen, your very obliged humble Servant,

“J. H. L. HUNT.

“To the above authorities let me add the still higher one of Horace himself, who says in his *Art of Poetry* :

“‘Nec verbo verbum curabis reddere fidus
Interpres.’”

The Hunts, however, were not satisfied with this co-operative renown, and determined that Master Leigh should open a business of his own. Subscribers were obtained from both sides of the Atlantic to the number of eight hundred and seven, including ambassadors, academicians, clergymen, clerks, members of Parliament, one lord, and a poet laureate. The names of Hoppner, Lawrence, Horne Tooke, and William Gifford may be found on the list. Finally, in 1801 appeared *Juvenilia*;

or, *A Collection of Poems written between the Ages of Twelve and Sixteen by J. H. L. Hunt, late of the Grammar School of Christ's Hospital.* "The book was unfortunately successful everywhere, particularly in the metropolis." Its author "was introduced to literati, and shown about among parties."

His life was more permanently influenced, however, by an article which appeared at a still earlier date in the *Monthly Preceptor*, "which was then open to the first attempts of youth in the exercise of original composition." The superiority of his production excited the admiration of a young lady with literary ambitions, then in her twelfth year, who had herself been urged to contribute to the paper, and she expressed a desire to meet the author, with whom she dared not enter into competition. A mutual friend brought Leigh Hunt to the house and introduced him to Miss Elizabeth Kent, her mother, formerly a court milliner, and her elder sister Marianne. On a subsequent visit he had the good luck to be detained by an attack of St. Anthony's fire, which required some weeks' careful nursing. He then became a permanent lodger, and Marianne seems very rapidly to have won the affections of this "young Roscius in authorship" by means of her sparkling black eyes,—according to his son. They were engaged in 1801, the year already marked by the publication of *Juvenilia*, when the lady was aged thirteen and her lover only four years older!! "She was the reverse of handsome," says her son, "and without accomplishments, but she had a pretty figure, beautiful black hair, which reached down to her knees,

magnificent eyes, and a very unusual natural turn for plastic art. She was an active and thrifty housewife, until the curious malady with which she was seized totally undermined her strength." She naturally admired the handsome if somewhat priggish young poet, whose letters were for the most part composed of good advice, elegant descriptions, and correct apologies, intermingled with pretty protestations of undying affection, and trifles in verse. He became, indeed, so imprudently zealous for her intellectual improvement that they were temporarily estranged, but by the timely exertions of her sister Elizabeth, always a good friend to Leigh Hunt, the quarrel was made up, and never again renewed during an engagement of seven or eight years.

His own method of describing his constancy is somewhat curious. "I had never ceased," he says of this period, "to be ready to fall in love with the first tender-hearted damsel that should encourage me. Now it was a fair charmer, and now a brunette; now a girl who sang, or a girl who danced; now one that was merry, or was melancholy, or seemed to care for nothing, or everything, or was a good friend, or good sister, or good daughter. With this last, who completed her conquest by reading verses better than I had ever yet heard, I ultimately became wedded for life; and she reads verses better than ever to this day, especially some that shall be nameless." The Rev. Isaac, it may be remembered, gained a wife by his charming delivery.

Leigh Hunt began the nomad and Bohemian method of life, from which he never entirely escaped, at a very

early period. He seems not to have settled at home after school-days, but to have paid various visits to friends at Cambridge and Oxford, and, as we have seen, to the Kents. Without believing in the scare concerning Buonaparte's invasion, he joined the volunteers. "He was for a short time a clerk with his brother Stephen, an attorney, and was afterwards placed in the War Office by Mr. Addington."

But his heart was given to literature, and, soon after the publication of *Juvenilia*, he was fortunately directed to a study of prose. "It is true," he writes, "that in consequence of the way in which we were taught to use them by the schoolmaster, I had become far more disgusted than delighted with the charming papers of Addison, and with the exaction of moral observations on a given subject. But the seed was sown, to ripen under pleasanter circumstances; and my father, with his usual good-natured impulse, making me one day a present of a set of the British classics. . . . the tenderness with which I had come to regard all my school recollections, and the acquaintance which I now made for the first time with the lively papers of the *Connoisseur*, gave me an entirely fresh and delightful sense of the merits of essay-writing." Goldsmith "enchanted" him, and "these, with Fielding and Smollett, Voltaire, Charlotte Smith, Bage, Mrs. Radcliffe, and Augustus la Fontaine, were his favourite prose authors. . . . He read every history that came in his way, and could not help liking old Heroditus, ditto Villani, picturesque, festive Froissart, and accurate and most entertaining, though arti-

ficial, Gibbon. . . . But the writer who made the greatest impression on him was Voltaire," though he did not read French at that time, and "he fought for him then and afterwards with those who challenged him to the combat." Voltaire, he declares with enthusiasm, "‘pierced through the absurdity of the plot to the hidden majesty of the subject.’ He laid the axe to a heap of savage abuses; pulled the corner-stones out of dungeons and inquisitions; bowed and mocked the most tyrannical absurdities out of countenance; and raised one prodigious peal of laughter at superstition, from Naples to the Baltic." Hunt was, moreover, very fond of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*; a great reader of Pope, and of Dryden—"but not with that relish for his nobler versification which he afterwards acquired."

To dramatic reading he was always disinclined, though the passion for writing plays and frequenting the theatre was already in full force. The latter propensity was turned to practical ends, and he contributed, in 1805, a series of theatrical criticisms to the *News*, which were characterised by unusual independence and vigour.

This, however, was but the prelude to more serious ventures, and, in the beginning of 1808, he set up with his brother John a Sunday paper called *The Examiner*, of which "the main objects were to assist in producing reform in Parliament, liberality of opinion in general (especially freedom from superstition), and a fusion of literary tastes into all subjects whatever."

The vigour and literary ability of the editor attracted

notice from the beginning, and by the November of 1808 its circulation had reached 2,200, with every prospect of increase. It is calculated that *The Examiner* at this time secured to each of the brothers an income of eight or ten guineas a week, and, with the additional £100 a year received from the War Office, Leigh Hunt felt justified in thinking of marriage. To Marianne he now writes:—"I can anticipate what your love might prompt you to say,—that we could live on little,—but I have seen so much of the irritabilities or rather the miseries arising from want of a *suitable* income, and the best woman of her time" (his mother, of course) "was so worried, and finally worn out with the early negligence of others in this respect, that if ever I was determined in anything, it is to be perfectly clear of the world, and ready to meet the exigencies of a married life before I do marry, for I will not see a wife, who loves me and is the joy of my existence, afraid to speak to me of money matters; she shall never tremble to hear a knock at the door, or to meet a quarter-day; she will tremble, I hope, with nothing but love and joy in the arms of her husband." Principles, however, must not be sacrificed, even to prudence so well founded; and in the course of the next month we find him resigning his position at the War Office in order to give more time to his editorial duties, and to gain the sense of political independence which he conceived to be essential.

He was married July 3, 1809, and from that date the outer course of his life presents but little variation. He was now established as a journalist and a man of letters,

subsisting mainly on the former profession, but with his heart in the latter. Of himself and his brother he writes :—"We had absolutely no views whatever, but those of a decent competence and of the public good ; and we thought, I dare affirm, a great deal more of the latter than of the former. Our competence we allowed too much to shift for itself. Zeal for the public good was a family inheritance, and this we thought ourselves bound to increase. As to myself, what I thought of more than either was the making of verses. I did nothing for the greater part of the week but write verses and read books. I then made a rush at my editorial duties ; took a world of superfluous pains in the writing ; sat up late at night, and was a very trying person to compositors and newsmen. I sometimes have before me the ghost of a pale and gouty printer whom I specially caused to suffer, and who never complained. I think of him and of some needy dramatist, and wish they had been worse men."

In spite of the great number of affairs which passed through his hands, Leigh Hunt was never business-like, and his married life was from the beginning a comfortless scramble. But he possessed, to a marked degree, the family genius for ignoring the grave and enjoying the trivial, snatching pleasures as they flew, and supporting days of trouble by his innocent enjoyment of the passing hour. "Those who knew him best," says his son, "will picture him to themselves clothed in a dressing-gown, and bending his head over a book or over the desk. At some periods of his life he rose early,

in order that he might get to work early; in other periods he rose late, because he sat over the desk very late. For the most part, however, he habitually came down 'too late' for breakfast, and was no sooner seated sideways at the table than he began to read. After breakfast he repaired to his study, where he remained until he went out to take his walk. He sometimes read at dinner, though not always. At some periods of his life he would sleep after dinner, but usually he retired from the table to read. He read at tea-time, and all the evening read or wrote. In early life, his profession took him, as a critic, to the theatres, and the same employment took him there at later dates. In the earlier half of his existence he mixed somewhat in society, and his own house was noted, among a truly selected circle of friends, for the tasteful ease of its conversation and recreation, music usually forming a staple in both the talk and diversion."

From the early chapters of the *Autobiography* we get some charming glimpses of this circle. There were the handsome Du Bois, editor of the *Monthly Mirror*, who "had no faculty for gravity"; Thomas Campbell, "with a consciousness of authorship upon him"; "the merry *jongleur*," Theodore Hook; Matthews the comedian, who "looked like an irritable in-door pet"; and the authors of *The Rejected Addresses*, James and Horace Smith. With the Lambs he was already intimate, and at the table of Mr. Hunter, the bookseller who had married Mrs. Kent, he met a somewhat less distinguished group: the ferocious Fuseli, Bonnycastle, and Kinnaird,

who listened to "God save the King" "as if his soul had taken its hat off."

One fancies that his friends must sometimes have been in doubt about finding him at home, for I have traced him to seventeen addresses during fifty years without being able to account for the whole period. He lived principally, however, in the Vale of Health, Hampstead, and in Upper Cheyne Row, a few doors from the Carlyles ; more temporary homes being established at Highgate, Kensington, and Hammersmith.

The period immediately following the foundation of the *Examiner* was probably the most prosperous of his life. In four years "he firmly established for the first time," says Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse, in his *Life of Leigh Hunt*, "a paper which fought, and fought effectively, with prejudice and privilege, with tyranny and superstition, which was a beacon of light to all men of Liberal principles in the country, and set the example of that independent thought and fearless expression of opinion which has since become the very life and power of the press."

No small share of this notable achievement must be undoubtedly attributed to his brother John, of whom Albany Fonblanque, Leigh's editorial successor, has enthusiastically written. "He was a man of rare stamp ; an honester never breathed. His own sufferings were the only sufferings to which he could be indifferent. There never was a question in John Hunt's mind as to the side to be taken in any discussion, but the question of justice, which he determined to the best of his judgment, and acted upon the conclusion at all risks. *He*

fought the battle in the front ranks when the battle was the hottest, but he passed into retirement in the very hour of victory, as if he had done nothing and deserved nothing of the triumphant cause."

It was not to be expected that such a reforming organ should escape the notice of those in power, and three attempts had already been made to prosecute *The Examiner*, when, on the 22nd of March, 1812, there appeared an article on the Prince Regent, which stood little chance of escape. *The Morning Post*, "which then affected to be the organ of the Court," had indulged in a column of fulsome flattery to the Regent, whose name had recently been received with hisses at an Irish banquet. *The Examiner* went into the facts at considerable length with unsparing frankness, and thus concluded:—

"The same page (of *The Morning Post*) contained also a set of wretched commonplace lines in French, Italian, Spanish, and English, *literally* addressing the Prince Regent in the following terms, among others:—'You are the *glory of the people*. You are the *protector of the arts*. You are the *Mæcenæ of the age*. Wherever you appear you conquer all hearts, wipe away tears, excite *desire and love*, and win *beauty* towards you. You breathe *eloquence*, you inspire the graces, you are *Adonis in loveliness*. 'Thus gifted,' it proceeds in English—

"Thus gifted with each grace of mind,
Born to delight and bless mankind ;
Wisdom, with Pleasure in her train,
Great Prince ! shall signalise thy reign :
To Honour, Virtue, Truth allied—

The nation's safeguard and its pride ;
 With monarchs of immortal fame
 Shall bright renown enrol thy name.

“What person, unacquainted with the true state of the case, would imagine, on reading these astounding eulogies, that this *glory of the people* was the subject of millions of shrugs and reproaches ; that this *protector of arts* had named a wretched foreigner for his historical painter, in disparagement or in ignorance of the merits of his own countrymen ; that this *Mæcenas of the age* patronised not a single deserving writer ; that this *breather of eloquence* could not say a few decent extempore words, if we are to judge, at least, from what he said to his regiment on its embarkation for Portugal ; that this *conqueror of hearts* was the dissembler of hopes ; that this *exciter of desire* (bravo ! Messieurs of the *Post* !), this *Adonis in loveliness*, was a corpulent gentleman of fifty ; in short, that this *delightful, blissful, wise, pleasurable, honourable, virtuous, true and immortal* prince was a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country, or the respect of posterity ?

“These are hard truths ; but are they *not* truths, and have we not suffered enough ?—are we not now suffering bitterly from the disgusting flatteries of which the above is a repetition ? The ministers may talk of the shocking boldness of the press, and may throw out their wretched warnings about interviews between Mr. Perceval and Sir Vicary Gibbs, but let us inform them that such vices as have just been enumerated are shocking to all Englishmen who have a just sense of the state of Europe ; and that he is a bolder man who, in times like the present, dares to afford reason for the description. Would to God *The Examiner* could ascertain that difficult, and perhaps undiscoverable, point which enables a public writer to keep clear of an appearance of the love of scandal while he is hunting out the vices of those in power. Then should one paper, at least, in this metropolis help to rescue the nation from the charge of silently

encouraging what it must publicly rue ; and the Sardanapalus, who is now afraid of none but informers, be taught to shake in the midst of his minions, in the very drunkenness of his heart, at the voice of honesty. But if this be impossible, still there is one benefit which truth may derive from adulation—one benefit which is favourable to the former in proportion to the grossness of the latter, and of which none of his flatterers seem to be aware—the opportunity of contradicting its assertions. Let us never forget this advantage, which adulation cannot help giving us ; and let such of our readers as are inclined to deal insincerely with the great from a false notion of policy, and of knowledge of the world, take warning from what they now see of the miserable effects of courtly disguise, paltering, and profligacy. Flattery in any shape is unworthy a man and a gentleman ; but political flattery is almost a request to be made slaves. If we would have the great to be what they ought, we must find some means or other to speak of them as they are.”

“This article, no doubt,” wrote its author in later years, “was very bitter and contemptuous ; therefore, in the legal sense of the term, very libellous ; the more so inasmuch as it was very true.” Though the truth of a libel may serve to establish a man’s legal guilt, it does not of necessity prove him morally innocent, and there was a considerable amount of folly, we had almost said of selfishness, in this furious plain dealing. Leigh Hunt was perfectly sincere, but a little reflection should have taught him that, by indulging in reproaches against a careless prince, he was running at least a very good chance of hampering his own powers for reform without weakening in any way the position of the enemy. His anger was righteous, but he gave way to it, and had to suffer the consequences.

It may be further noticed that this article was by no

means the first in which he had treated the subject. He began the attack in February 23, and continued it almost without intermission, and with increasing vigour, from week to week. Nor was this all, for after the prosecution had been announced, and while proceedings were being delayed by the non-attendance of special jurors, he published two letters in *The Examiner*, well calculated to add fuel to the flame. On November 29 he addressed the Prince Regent in a tone of mingled sarcasm and compassion, declaring, with an affected seriousness scarcely intended to be convincing, that "he is egregiously deceived if he supposes that a favourable verdict will be of the least service to him, either then or hereafter," and that, by persisting in the action, he will create "a tenfold diffusion of the libel, with all the comments of a pro-and-con arguing." On the other hand, imprisonment will give the writer double leisure to polish his weapons.

"The question is not between a prince and a mere libel; it is not between the sovereign dignity and a popular piece of presumption; it is, as I have already stated, between the licentious example of a court and the voice of public virtue; it is a question how far those vices, which do not come under the cognisance of the laws, are to be subject to the control of the public spirit; it is a question how far the chief magistrate or his representative is to violate the first and most exemplary duties of his station, and not to be told of the violation; it is a question, in short, how far the petty comfort of one man is to be preferred to the vital interest of millions, and to the last security of national existence. Anything short of the importance of such a question should never have induced us to waste our time in speaking of individuals, whom, in private life, we should not have condescended to notice. . . . Your brothers, sir, will be

neither more or less noticed in this paper than they have been, whatever may be the result of our trial ; it is extremely disagreeable to us to be obliged to notice them at all, and the Duke of Cumberland in particular has a good chance of being as exempt as possible from our handling, if it be only from a more than ordinary distaste. As long as he behaves well. . . . I shall not meddle with him. Would to God I could say as much for your Royal Highness ; but the question of which I have just spoken, and *that only*, makes you important enough for animadversion ; and till you cease to be involved in it, you may as well think to shake off the atmosphere that surrounds you, or the consciousness of all you know of yourself in private, as the presence and watchfulness of *The Examiner*."

This was followed on December 6 by a still more outspoken epistle to the judge, Lord Ellenborough, exhorting him not to lose his temper.

It is improbable, however, that these letters affected the result of the trial, which was indeed a foregone conclusion from the first, despite the powerful eloquence of Lord Brougham's judicial irony for the defence. After describing, with friendly zeal, the private character of Leigh Hunt, and the circumstances by which he had been excited to this intemperate expression of opinion, the learned counsel maintained that all responsibility was vested in the *Post* for "covering that exalted and illustrious character, under the name of panegyric, with the vilest and most abominable ridicule—a ridicule which, I know, cannot attend that illustrious Prince ; but if not, that is to his praise, for it shows him to be so exalted as to be above ridicule, but which, in my mind, would subject to the most severe ridicule any inferior or subordinate character. It is impossible for any private man, or

indeed any man, except his Royal Highness himself, to have these things written and published of him, without his being the subject of the most insufferable ridicule." The aim of *The Examiner*, he contended, was to expose this gross flattery, and certain allusions to melancholy facts could scarcely have been avoided. By saying that the Prince was "over head and ears in debt," it is implied only that "one branch of the revenue is in arrear;" his Royal Highness may be called "a despiser of domestic ties," because the nation had been taxed for the maintenance of a separate establishment; and the favourites at court are fit subjects for discussion, "for they cannot have all their little merits basking in the sunshine of notoriety, and have all their little failings protected in the shade of obscurity."

Lord Brougham, however, did not maintain this biting satire to the end. His final appeal to the jury was based on the broad principles of national morality:—

"Are you, then, I ask, prepared to say—and if you are, convict!—but *are* you prepared to say, that vices the most shameless in their public exhibition, and most dangerous in their example, if they only reign in a court, shall from henceforth be above all manner of reproof, as they are already above legal control? You know the laws do not reach them—for I am speaking of immoralities which public justice knows not how to deal with, and which yet are practised by the most public characters, with the widest influence of example. I am speaking of persons above the check of legal visitation—and who, if not controlled by the public voice, are not controlled at all? Are you, then, prepared to say that henceforth every check upon them shall be withdrawn? For if their conduct may no longer be canvassed, there is no earthly check remaining to curb them. Are you

prepared to say that the defendant must be viewed as a harmless, but visionary moralist—a misguided, though amiable fanatic—an innocent young man, ignorant of the endearing vices which sweeten and embellish fashionable life? Will you tell me that he is an outrageous lover of domestic virtue—an observer of domestic ties—a despiser of libertines—to Puritanical and ridiculous excess? Will you—dare you say—it is your duty, as twelve honest men, married to virtuous wives, and the fathers of English children—to pronounce this writer a poor, mistaken, bewildered, uncourtly Puritan? Will you tell me that we must no more talk of the morals of our ancestors, or of their decorum—that we must begin to scoff at their prudence—and unable to imitate their virtue, throw off even the covering of decency? Are we no longer to hate where we find vice—to pity where we find effeminacy—to laugh where we see foppery—to despise where we find cowardice? Are we really come to this stage of improvement? Are these the inventions of this our age? And is it, indeed, in England that these things have come to pass? But tell me, I beseech you, the date of this new era—let us, at least, know the period from which we are to calculate our ruin. Let me only know the time when it was first determined in England, that an honest, manly, ardent, hazardous, even an incautious exposure of NOTORIOUS VICES IN PUBLIC MEN, of OSTENTATIOUS IMMORALITY IN THE HIGHEST STATIONS, is a *crime*, and not a *duty*, in those who instruct the people! If you abide by such principles, if you are resolved to annihilate, in an instant, all the control by which the great are restrained, if you are desirous to open the floodgates that have heretofore stemmed the current of courtly vices, to break down the only fences that guard the land, and to see all decency as well as virtue overwhelmed in the flood, if you would let loose upon after ages (for in the present day the purity of the late reign may avert such a visitation), if upon after ages you would let loose a race, compared with whom the first Charles was wise—the second honourable—and prodigies of ancient tyranny compassionate and chaste—then pronounce a verdict of GUILTY! And God forbid that any of yourselves should live to gather its fruit; but may our posterity, who *must* see it ripen, know to whom they owe it! But I am fancying

impossible things—I am terrifying myself and you with unreal dangers. The country's highest interests are safe in your honest hands. We have endured long—we have suffered much—we have been severely visited—we have been variously wronged—but this worst of degradations we must escape—for the appeal has been made to justice, and it cannot, it may not fail."

Sir William Garrow's reply was comparatively brief, being based on the obvious contention that the article was maliciously designed to create ill-feeling against the Prince; and Lord Ellenborough drove home the prosecution by a grossly partial charge. He first begged the question by stating the issue to be "whether we are to live under the dominion of libellers, or under the control and government of law," and after dealing, in equally violent language, with the terms of the article itself, exhorted the jury to pronounce it "a foul, atrocious, and malignant libel."

The brothers Hunt were found guilty, fined £500 a-piece, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in separate gaols.

Leigh Hunt throws a strange light on the nature of his moral indignation by declaring that "a free and noble waving of the punishment would have bowed our hearts into regret. We should have found in it the evidence of that true generosity of nature paramount to whatsoever was frivolous or appeared to be mean, which his flatterers claimed for him, and which would have made us blush *for the formal virtues to which we seemed to be attached, when, in reality, nothing would have*

better pleased us than such a combination of the gay and the magnanimous." The readers of *The Examiner*, perhaps, would not have been quite so ready to forgive and forget. With the Prince Regent himself, indeed, the editor had no personal quarrel—"Could I meet him in some odd corner of the Elysian fields, where charity had room for both of us, I should first apologise to him for having been the instrument in the hand of events for attacking a fellow-creature, and then expect to hear him avow as hearty a regret for having injured myself, and for justly treated his wife."

In *The Examiner*, Leigh Hunt assured his readers that, so far from being downcast, he was just then actually recovering in health and spirits from "a sickness which luckily attacked him when he had no idea of going to prison," and that, "not having been guilty of any of the actions that make people unable to bear adversity, he could not consent to be more uncomfortable than the ordinary casualties of sickness or worldly trouble might render him." The *Autobiography* contains a very full account of his life in prison, coloured by the kindly optimism of after years, and it is certain that he obtained many compensations for his sufferings. His wife and children were allowed to join him, and, at the insistence of the doctor, he secured fairly comfortable quarters.

"The infirmary was divided into four wards, with as many small rooms attached to them. The two upper wards were occupied, but the two on the floor had never been used; and one of these, not very

idently (for I had not yet learned to think of money), turned into a noble room. I papered the walls with a trellis of roses ; I had the ceiling coloured with clouds and sky ; the barred windows I screened with Venetian blinds ; and when my bookcases were set up with their busts, and flowers and a pianoforte made their appearance, perhaps there was not a handsomer room on that side the water. I took a pleasure, when a stranger knocked at the door, to see him come in and stare about him. The surprise on issuing from the borough, and passing through the avenues of the gaol, was dramatic. Charles Lamb declared there was no other such room, except in a fairy tale.

“ But I possessed another surprise, which was a garden. There was a little yard outside the room, railed off from another belonging to the neighbouring ward. This yard was shut in with green palings, adorned it with a trellis, strewed it with a thick bed of earth from a nursery, and even contrived to have a grass-plot. The earth I filled with flowers ; they were allowed to be perfect. Thomas Moore, who came to see me with Lord Byron, told me he had seen no such heart’s-ease. I bought the *Parnaso italiano* while in prison, and used often to think of a passage in it, while looking at the miniature piece of horticulture :—

“ ‘ Mio picciol orto,
A me sei vigna, e campo, e selva, e prato.’—BALDI.

“ ‘ My little garden,
To me thou’rt vineyard, field, and meadow, and wood.’

“Here I wrote and read in fine weather, sometimes under an awning. In autumn my trellises were hung with scarlet-runners, which added to the flowery investment. I used to shut my eyes in my arm-chair, and fancy myself hundreds of miles off.

“But my triumph was in issuing forth of a morning. A wicket out of the garden led into the large one belonging to the prison. The latter was only for vegetables ; but it contained a cherry-tree, which I saw twice in blossom. I parcelled out the ground in my imagination into favourite districts. I made a point of dressing myself as if for a long walk ; and then putting on my gloves, and taking my book under my arm, stepped forth, requesting my wife not to wait dinner if I was too late.”

This “bower of roses” became a sort of shrine to many an ardent Liberal who had recognised the editor as a practical fighter in the cause he had at heart. Men of letters came to visit the critic in prison, and were eager to introduce their friends. Byron, Moore, Hazlitt, Cowden Clarke, the Lambs, Mill, Brougham, Bentham, and above all, Shelley, were among his visitors. Old school friends “used to knock at his door,” and Haydon, “sending those laughs of his about the place that sound like the trumpets of Jericho, and threaten to have the same effect.” Many of them came “with small gifts from large hearts,” and to all alike he was hospitable and gay. He was further occupied by *The Examiner*, which he edited throughout his imprisonment (dotting its pages with naïve paragraphs of autobiography), and by the composition of many poems.

It is a great mistake, however, to suppose that these years were altogether pleasant and profitable; though his own utterances may excuse the view, they do not alter the facts. He was in very bad health, and had been ordered daily rides at Brighton. Though cheered by friends and books, the sights and sounds of prison life were extremely trying to his nerves. There is a passage in the *Autobiography* which shows how greatly his spirit was broken. He is speaking of the day of his release:—

“It was now thought that I should dart out of my cage like a bird, and feel no end in the delight of ranging. But, partly from ill-health and partly from habit, the day of my liberation brought a great deal of pain with it. An illness of long standing, which required very different treatment, had by this time been burnt in upon me by the iron that enters into the soul of a captive, wrap it in flowers as he may; and I am ashamed to say, that after stopping at the house of my friend Alsager (just opposite the prison gates) I had not the courage to continue looking at the shoals of people passing to and fro, as the coach drove up the Strand. The whole business of life seemed a hideous impertinence. The first pleasant sensation I experienced was when the coach turned into the New Road, and I beheld the old hills of my affection standing where they used to do, and breathing me a welcome.”

The effect upon his character, as Mr. Monkhouse has well pointed out, was also serious:—“Imprisonment fostered his indolent habits of body, by restricting his

opportunities of exercise ; it confirmed his habit of self-absorption and self-indulgence ; it flattered his vanity at every point ; and it weakened, if possible, the small responsibility which he felt as to the conduct of his private concerns."

When Leigh Hunt came out of prison in 1815 his position was one of considerable influence in many directions. Among Liberals, political and literary, he was in some sort a recognised leader ; though his interest in politics had already begun to wane. He continued to edit *The Examiner*, keeping its pages open for the discussion of grievances and the advocacy of reform ; but he turned more and more to the subjects in which he was really interested—to the study and production of literature. He published poetry with a certain personal charm, which had an important influence upon his greater contemporaries ; and was perfecting that unique prose style which found perhaps its finest expression in the papers of *The Indicator*, 1819-20.

Meanwhile *The Examiner* printed many works of genius which were too advanced or too unconventional for the publishers, and its editor was ready with words of cordial welcome and praise. The association led usually to personal friendship, and Leigh Hunt was a very sociable fellow in those days. He had a little "white and green" study "overlooking the fields to Westbourne," where he received "the noble poet," while Lady Byron drove on to "Henderson's nursery ground," and Wordsworth, with the eyes of Ezekiel or Isaiah—not so fine as Carlyle's—who "had

a habit of keeping his left hand in the bosom of his waistcoat—and was sceptical on the merits of all kinds of poetry but one." Then there was Charles Lamb, with "a head worthy of Aristotle," and Coleridge, whose "forehead was prodigious—a great piece of placid marble," and a host of others, small and great. Of Keats he writes, that "it was a pleasure to his friends to have him in their houses, and he did not grudge it. I could not love him as deeply as I did Shelley. That was impossible. But my affection was only second to the one which I entertained for that heart of hearts." The sensitive youth had, unfortunately, been led to doubt the sincerity of Hunt's friendship, but no suspicion could have been more unfounded. Hunt, however, was ready to forgive it, and the beautiful letter, which he wrote to Severn at Rome, as it proved, a fortnight after the poet's death, remains a witness to his strong and constant affection.

"VALE OF HEALTH, HAMPSTEAD,

"March 8, 1821.

"DEAR SEVERN,—You have concluded, of course, that I have sent no letters to Rome, because I was aware of the effect they would have on Keats' mind; and this is the principal cause, for, besides what I have been told of his emotion about letters in Italy, I remember his telling me on one occasion that, in his sick moments, he never wished to receive another letter, or even to see another face, however friendly. But still I should have written to *you*, had I not been almost at death's door myself. You will imagine how ill I have been when you hear that I have but just begun writing again for *The Examiner* and *Indicator*, after an interval of several

months, during which my flesh wasted from me with sickness and melancholy. Judge how often I thought of Keats, and with what feelings. Mr. Brown tells me he is comparatively calm now, or rather quite so. If he can bear to hear of us, pray tell him ; but he knows it all already, and can put it in better language than any man. I hear he does not like to be told that he may get better ; nor is it to be wondered at, considering his firm persuasion that he shall not survive. He can only regard it as a puerile thing, and an insinuation that he cannot bear to think he shall die. But if this persuasion should happen no longer to be so strong upon him, or if he can now put up with such attempts to console him, remind him of what I have said a thousand times, and what I still (upon my honour, Severn) think always, that I have seen too many instances of recovery from apparently desperate cases of consumption not to indulge in hope to the very last. If he still cannot bear this, tell him—tell that great poet and noble-hearted man—that we shall all bear his memory in the most precious part of our hearts, and that the world shall bow their heads to it, as our loves do. Or if this again will trouble his spirit, tell him that we shall never cease to remember and love him ; and that, Christian or infidel, the most sceptical of us has faith enough in the high things that nature puts into our heads, to think that all who are of one accord in mind or heart are journeying to one and the same place, and shall unite somehow or other again, face to face, mutually conscious, mutually delighted. Tell him he is only before us on the road, as he was in everything else ; or, whether you tell him the latter or no, tell him the former, and add that we shall never forget that he was so, and that we are coming after him. The tears are again in my eyes, and I must not afford to shed them. The next letter I write shall be more to yourself, and a little more refreshing to your spirits, which we are very sensible must have been greatly taxed. But whether our friend dies or not, it will not be among the least lofty of your recollections by and by that you helped to smooth the sick-bed of so fine a being. God bless you, dear Severn.

“ Your sincere friend,

“ LEIGH HUNT.”

When Leigh Hunt first met Shelley he was "a youth, not come to his full growth ; very gentlemanly, earnestly gazing at every object that interested him, and quoting the Greek dramatists." The friendship did not ripen immediately, but each became from time to time conscious of the other's progress in life, and when Shelley was thrown into the deepest conflict of passion by Harriet's suicide, it was to Leigh Hunt that he turned for consolation. His confidence was amply justified, and from henceforth it was never withheld. Their intimacy was of a rare kind, unclouded by misunderstanding or jealousy, founded on the deepest sympathy in principles and taste. In all matters between them the distinctions of *meum* and *tuum* were lost sight of, though it happened that, so far as purely financial relationships were concerned, the more difficult part of gracefully *receiving* benefits fell to Leigh Hunt. As much as £1,400 is said to have passed between them in one year, and this sum by no means represents the whole of Hunt's indebtedness. It is alike to the credit of both that the fact caused no rupture in their intimacy, or in that of their wives. A glance at the debtor's method of expressing gratitude may serve in some measure to explain this anomaly. "My dear Mary," he writes to Mrs. Shelley in September, 1821, "pray thank Shelley, or rather do not, for that kind part of his offer relating to the expenses. I find I have omitted it, but the instinct that led me to do so is more honourable to him than thanks. I hope you think so." There can be no doubt that both the Shelleys *were* of this opinion.

Hunt always regretted that, for any undertaking in which they were mutually interested—such as the support of the young Hunts—Shelley had more means than he, but a consideration for his friend's feelings prevented his dwelling upon this misfortune.

The theory, of course, may be easily ridiculed, and it would be dangerous in ordinary life for ordinary persons, but for Shelley and Hunt it possessed complete efficacy. It happens, moreover, that there is abundant evidence of Hunt's cheerful readiness to apply it—towards Haydon, for instance—in cases where the material loss was his own.

Hunt's devotion to Shelley was deep and passionate; he regarded him with a reverence that was almost idolatrous, and would listen to no depreciation of his genius or character. Such sentiments, however, were no bar to absolute freedom of personal intercourse, the give and take of true comradeship. Hunt could help his friend in *The Examiner*, and cordial criticisms in private were not wanting. Here, for instance, is his welcome to *The Cenci*:—"What a noble book, Shelley, have you given us! What a true, stately, and yet affectionate mixture of poetry, philosophy, and human nature, and horror, and all redeeming sweetness of intention, for there is an undersong of suggestion through it all, that sings, as it were, after the storm is over, like a brook in April." Hunt seems never tired of writing about Shelley and his work, but his longest and most noteworthy utterances are to be found in the *Autobiography* and the eloquent preface to the *Masque of Anarchy*, 1832.

Shelley's was indubitably the stronger spirit, and his feelings towards Hunt, though equally affectionate, are less absorbing. It is clear, however, that when the occasion offered, he would speak with no faltering tongue. *The Cenci* is dedicated to Leigh Hunt in these striking words :—" Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had selected for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent, and brave ; one of more exalted toleration for all who do and think evil, and yet himself more free from evil ; one who knows better how to receive and how to confer a benefit, though he must ever confer far more than he can receive ; one of simpler, and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners, I never knew, and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list."

It was during this period that Hunt published, in *Foliage*, those genial epistles to Byron, Thomas Moore, Hazlitt, who was always quarrelling with him and with everybody, and Charles Lamb who came " in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in daylight and in darkness " :—

" You'll guess why I can't see the snow-covered streets
Without thinking of you and your visiting feats,
When you call to remembrance how you and one more,
When I wanted it most, used to knock at my door,
For when the sad winds told us rain would come down,
Or snow upon snow fairly clogged up the town,
And dun yellow fogs brooded over its white,
So that scarcely a being was seen towards night.

Then, then said the lady y-clept near and dear,
'Now mind what I tell you—the L.'s will be here.'
So I poked up the flame, and she got out the tea,
And down we both sat, as prepared as could be ;
And there, sure as fate, came the knock of you two,
Then the lanthorn, the laugh, and the 'Well, how d'ye do?'"

He had recently made the acquaintance also of Hogg, Peacock, Charles Lloyd, and "a pleasant young man of the name of Procter (Barry Cornwall), who was a little boy at Harrow when Lord Byron was there." There were circles, moreover, in which he was already regarded as an oracle. Charles Cowden Clarke had followed the example of his parents, and "fell as pronely in love with him as any girl in her teens falls in love with her first-seen Romeo." Mary Clarke had been brought up in the faith by the Vincent Novellos, among whose friends were Charles Ollier, H. Robertson, and the brothers Gattie. From Clarke's delightful *Recollections of Writers* we learn that "when, as was frequently the case, he found himself left master of the field of talk by his delighted hearers, only too glad to have him recount, in his felicitous way, one of his good stories, or utter some of his good things, he would go on in a strain of sparkle, brilliancy, and freshness like a sunlit stream in a spring meadow. Melodious in tone, alluring in accent, eloquent in choice of words, Leigh Hunt's talk was as delicious to listen to as rarest music."

Haydon's more discriminating praise is almost equally strong:—"Though Leigh Hunt is not deep in knowledge, moral, metaphysical, or classical, yet he is intense

in feeling, and has an intellect for ever on the alert. He is like one of those instruments on three legs which, throw it how you will, always pitches on two, and has a spike striking for ever up, and ever ready for you. He 'sets' at a subject with a scent like a pointer. . . . As a man, I know none with such an affectionate heart, if never opposed in his opinions. He has defects, of course; one of his great defects is getting inferior people about him to listen, too fond of shining at any expense in society, and a love of approbation from the darling sex, bordering upon weakness."

Charles Lamb's testimony—to Southey, is unqualified:—"He is one of the most cordial-minded men I ever knew, and matchless as a fireside companion."

But there was a dark side to this cheery picture. The strain of his journalistic responsibilities was telling upon his strength, and his wife, on whom he had learned to depend in all practical affairs, became a confirmed invalid. *The Examiner* was not flourishing. Under these circumstances, the ill-fated offer from Byron and Shelley to join them in publishing a magazine for their more daring effusions seemed to be peculiarly opportune.¹ Shelley wrote, on behalf of Byron, to offer Hunt the editorship of the new paper, with a half share of the profits, in which he himself did not care to participate. Byron, meanwhile, sent him £200 for the journey, receiving a bond from Shelley for the amount. The

¹ The statement that he undertook to continue editing *The Examiner* while in Italy is quite unreasonable, and contradictory to all the evidence.

sequel is well known. After a peculiarly disastrous journey, Hunt settled in the ground-floor of Byron's palace at Pisa, the Casa Lanfranchi, which the latter had pretended to furnish for him, though again receiving a bond from Shelley for the amount expended. In after years, Hunt could hardly bear to speak of the first happy days with his friend :—"In a day or two Shelley took leave of us to return to Lerici for the rest of the season, meaning, however, to see us more than once in the interval. I spent one delightful afternoon with him, wandering about Pisa, and visiting the cathedral. On the night of the same day, he took a post-chaise for Leghorn, intending next morning to depart with his friend, Captain Williams, for Lerici. I entreated him, if the weather were violent, not to give way to his daring spirit and venture to sea. He promised me he would not, and it seems that he did set off later than he otherwise would have done, apparently at a more favourable moment. I never beheld him more."

That night there was a tremendous storm of thunder and lightning. A few days later Trelawny came to Pisa with the news that Shelley was missing, and, after a dreadful interval of more than a week, the body was washed up near the town of Via Reggia, with a copy of Keats' *Lamia* in the jacket pocket.

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"The remains of Shelley and Mr. Williams were burnt after the good ancient fashion, and gathered into coffers. Those of Mr. Williams were subsequently taken to England. Shelley's were interred at Rome, in the Protestant burial-ground, the place which

he had so touchingly described in recording its reception of Keats. The ceremony of the burning was alike beautiful and distressing. Trelawny, who had been the chief person concerned in ascertaining the fate of his friends, completed his kindness by taking the most active part on this last mournful occasion. He and his friend, Captain Shenley, were first upon the ground, attended by proper assistants. Lord Byron and myself arrived shortly afterwards. His lordship got out of his carriage, but wandered away from the spectacle, and did not see it. I remained inside the carriage, now looking on, now drawing back, with feelings that were not to be witnessed.

“None of the mourners, however, refused themselves the little comfort of supposing that lovers of books and antiquity, like Shelley and his companion—Shelley in particular, with his Greek enthusiasm—would not have been sorry to foresee this part of their fate. The mortal part of him, too, was saved from corruption; not the least extraordinary part of his history. Among the materials for burning, as many of the gracefuller and more classical articles as could be procured—frankincense, wine, etc.—were not forgotten; and to these Keats’ volume was added. The beauty of the flame arising from the funeral pile was extraordinary. The weather was beautifully fine. The Mediterranean, now soft and lucid, kissed the shore as if to make peace with it. The yellow sand and blue sky were intensely contrasted with one another; marble mountains touched the air with coolness; and the flame of the fire bore away towards heaven in vigorous amplitude, waving and quivering with a brightness of inconceivable beauty. It seemed as though it contained the glossy essence of vitality. You might have expected a seraphic countenance to look out of it, turning once more before it departed, to thank the friends that had done their duty.

“Yet, see how extremes can appear to meet, even on occasions the most overwhelming; nay, even by reason of them; for as cold can perform the effect of fire and burn us, so can despair put on the monstrous aspect of mirth. On returning from one of our visits to this sea-shore we dined and drank—I mean Lord Byron and myself—dined little and drank too much. Lord Byron had not shone that day, even in his cups, which usually brought out his best

qualities. As to myself, I had bordered upon emotions which I have never suffered myself to indulge, and which, foolishly as well as impatiently, render calamity, as somebody termed it, 'an affront and not a misfortune.' The barouche drove rapidly through the forest of Pisa. We sang, we laughed, we shouted. I even felt a gaiety the more shocking, because it was real and a relief. What the coachman thought of us, God knows; but he helped to make up a ghastly trio. He was a good-tempered fellow and an affectionate husband and father; yet he had the reputation of having offered his master to kill a man. I wish to have no such waking dream again. It was worthy of a German ballad."

Hunt, in fact, was thoroughly unhinged, and Byron's behaviour was ill-calculated to heal the wound. In business relations, moreover, he was positively deceitful. He had got tired of his own scheme, and was frightened by the warnings of aristocratic friends in England against having any dealings with the Radical journalist. He told Hunt that his friends had been "at him," but distinctly implied that he was *not* influenced by their advice, and pretended to maintain his interest in the affair, while persistently putting obstacles in the way of its execution.

He wrote to his friends, meanwhile, that Hunt was an honest fellow, and, though "*The Liberal* won't do, he cannot desert him *after being pressed to engage in it.*"

Hunt, thus hindered in the work for which he had been invited, without being freed from its responsibilities, was *compelled by Byron* to accept the latter's aid, doled out to him through the degrading medium of a steward. The two men were essentially incompatible, and found great difficulty in living together. They had no apprecia-

tion of each other's merits, and no tolerance for each other's faults. To Byron, Hunt was a cockney and a vulgar coxcomb, at one time insufferably familiar, at another affectedly formal. Hunt could only recognise the proper natural Byron "when he had got wine in his head," a fact which he records as "a credit to his noble acquaintance." With the ladies of the party it was even worse. They refused to meet, and Mrs. Hunt, at least, had little toleration for Byron, drunk or sober. "Trelawny, here," said the poet one day, "has been speaking against my morals." "It is the first time I ever heard of them," she replied.

Moreover, as he admits himself, Hunt had not a proper admiration of Byron's genius, an indignity which his lordship returned with interest. It was not many years since he had written to Moore of Hunt's *Foliage* :—

"He sent out his *Foliage* by Percy Shelley . . . and, of all the ineffable centaurs that were ever begotten by self-love upon a nightmare, I think this monstrous sagittary the most prodigious. *He* is an honest charlatan, who has persuaded himself into a belief of his own impostures, and talks Punch in pure simplicity of heart, taking himself (as poor Fitzgerald said of *himself* in *The Morning Post*) for *vates* in both senses, or nonsenses, of the word. Did you look at the translations of his own which he prefers to Pope and Cowper, and says so? Did you read his skimble-skamble about Wordsworth being at the head of his own *profession* in the *eyes* of *those* who followed it? I thought poetry was an *art*, or an *attribute*, and not a *profession*."

It is clear that these men could never pull together,

and it can hardly be said that they made the attempt. Hunt worked hard enough over *The Liberal*, but he could not have given a thought to meeting the public taste, or even to sparing in any degree the public favourites. Byron gave him the things which Murray had refused, brilliant enough, but very offensive; and Hunt gaily knocked his head against the brick wall of British prejudices in politics and in literature. Shelley's exquisite contributions were caviare to the general, and Hazlitt's vigorous essays were reckless, after his manner. The consequences were such as might have been expected. *The Liberal* dragged through four numbers, and then died for very lack of vitality, the publisher, John Hunt, being prosecuted and fined for printing "The Vision of Judgment."

During the latter period of its existence, Byron and Hunt had moved to Genoa, and settled in different houses, the latter in company with Mrs. Shelley, a far more comfortable arrangement. In July, 1823, Byron again left Genoa for Greece, and Hunt moved on to Florence. Byron had given him the money for this journey, and he had no means of going farther. This cost Byron £30, and for the Hunts' household expenses he paid £70, though the total amount of his generosity has been vaguely calculated at £500. The difference in these estimates, however, is not really important, for it is clear that he gave no more than he could help, and had brought the whole affair upon himself.

Hunt's prospects, meanwhile, were at a low ebb. He and his wife were both in bad health, and strangers alike

to the country and its inhabitants. However, the strain had been removed, and he, at any rate, was very ready to be pleased. In Florence itself he was delighted to find a lodging in "the street of beautiful women—Via della Belle Donne—a name which it is a sort of tune to pronounce," and to be kept awake at night by songs and guitars:—"For the moment we lived in the Italy of Books. . . . Wherever you turned was music or a graceful memory." But "agreeably to his rustic propensities," he did not stop long in the city. He moved to Maiano and "stuck to his Boccaccio haunts, as to an old home."—"I lived with the true human being, with his friends of the *Falcon* and the *Basil*, and my own not unworthy melancholy, and went about the flowering lanes and hills, solitary indeed, and sick to the heart, but not unsustained."

He was pining for England, however, and the best work he did in Italy may be found in the *Wishing Cap Papers*, contributed to *The Examiner*, March 28, 1824—October 26, 1825, afterwards incorporated in *The Town* and in *Men, Women, and Books* :—

"The title was very genuine," he declares. "When I put on my cap and pitched myself in imagination into the thick of Covent Garden, the pleasure I received was so vivid, I turned the corner of a street so much in the ordinary course of things, and was so tangibly present to the pavement, the shop windows, the people, and a thousand agreeable recollections which looked me naturally in the face, that sometimes when I walk there now, the impression seems hardly more real. I used to feel

as if I actually pitched my soul there, and that spiritual eyes might have seen it shot over from Tuscany into York Street, like a rocket. It is much pleasanter, however, on waking up, to find soul and body together in one's native land ; yes, even than among thy olives and vines, Boccaccio ! I not only missed 'the town' in Italy, I missed my old trees, oaks, and elms. Tuscany, in point of wood, is nothing but olive-ground and vineyard. . . . A tree of a reasonable height is a godsend ; the olives are low and hazy-looking, like dry sallows. You have plenty of these ; but to an Englishman, looking from a height, they appear little better than brushwood. Then, there are no meadows, no proper green lanes (at least, I saw none), no paths leading over field and stile, no hay-fields in June, nothing of that luxurious combination of green and russet, of grass, wild-flowers, and woods, over which a lover of Nature can stroll for hours with a foot as fresh as the stag's ; unvexed with chalk, dust, and an eternal public path, and able to lie down, if he will, and lie in clover. In short (saving, alas ! a finer sky and drier atmosphere, great ingredients in good spirits), we have the best part of Italy in books, and this we can enjoy in England. Give me Tuscany in Middlesex or Berkshire, and the Valley of Ladies between Harrow and Jack Straw's Castle. The proud names and flinty ruins above the Mensola may keep their distance. Boccaccio shall build a bower for us out of his books, of all that we choose to impart, and we will have daisies and fresh meadows besides."

It was in much the same spirit that his wife remarked

of the olive trees that they "looked as if they only grew by moonlight."

Hunt also contributed to the *Literary Examiner*, and published some translations while in Italy; but the deepest sentiments of his being were expressed in a little manual of faith, privately printed by John Forster in 1832, and called *Christianism; or, Belief and Unbelief Reconciled*. This was afterwards enlarged into the *The Religion of the Heart: A Manual of Faith and Duty*, 1853, of which the British Museum possesses a copy revised in manuscript for a new edition. In *Christianism* Leigh Hunt attempted to supply "thoughts and aspirations," and in *The Religion of the Heart* "a definite faith and a daily set of duties," "to such humble, yet un-abject, and truly religious souls, as cannot accept unintelligible and unworthy ties of conscience, and yet feel both their weakness and their earnestness with sufficient self-knowledge to desire ties of conscience, both as bonds and encouragements." Both works are composed with much devotional feeling and as little attention to dogma as possible. They are addressed to persons who appear to be of no religion, but desire some form of religion of their own, "not inconsistent with the exalted notions which they entertain of the Divine Spirit of the universe, and of the duties of beneficence," evincing great "reverence for the character and intentions of the "Founder of Christianity," without subscribing to the "opinions of him which have been dictated by theologians." The new religion is founded upon the best instincts of the human heart, "the tenderest and most teachable of God's

earthly works," and the dictates of reason, "the God-given Scripture in man's heart."

They are to a certain extent controversial, for the author is apt to grow impatient with "those who assert that no reasonable religion can prosper, because of its reason":—

"Every creed, they tell us, must contain something to daunt and defy reason; otherwise nobody will attend to it. It will not strike the senses of the world sharply enough; will not force them to quiver, and be awe-stricken, and give up their own judgment to 'God's'; for the assumption is, that God's judgment, being superior to man's, must so differ from it in kind as well as degree, that it must needs contain something finally discordant, and everlastingly to be deplored. Without threats to terrify us, and impossibilities to bend reason to faith, God, they say, would never be thought of, nor man kept in order. The Divine Teacher must succeed differently from all others, and make his children love him by dint of fear and terror; by setting pits of torment beside lessons incapable of comprehension. Such are the compliments which superstition pays the Creator!"

The positive articles of Leigh Hunt's creed were faith in the infinite wisdom and benevolence of God, the ultimate triumph of goodness and truth over sin and ignorance, and the continual advance towards a final realisation of perfect happiness for all mankind to all eternity. The practical virtues were cheerfulness and charity; a brief ritual, daily and weekly, was tentatively provided in *The Religion of the Heart*; but the greater part of the book was occupied with "transcripts of ancient and modern wisdom," "exercises of the heart in its duties and aspirations;" that is, paragraphs of reflection on

duties, punishments, and other spiritual matters, largely illustrated by quotations from teachers of all ages from Plato to Emerson.

Leigh Hunt was always anxious that this work should be regarded on its own merits, apart from his other work. This was partly because he felt that it stood alone as an actual part of his inner self, and partly because its claims to acceptance lay in the fact that "it was not his, except as the framer of its words; that the school was not his own, except inasmuch as he was a teacher under its masters." We fancy, however, that readers of to-day will value it, for the most part, as the beautiful expression of a pious and humane nature, full of tender sentiment and wide sympathy, whose aims in life and literature may be perfectly epitomised in his own maxim :—

"To consider the healthy, and, therefore, as far as mortality permits, happy exercise of all the faculties with which we have been gifted, as the self-evident final purpose of our being, so far as existence in this world is concerned; and as constituting, therefore, the right of every individual human creature, and the main earthly object of all social endeavour."

Christianism had been the utterance of a spirit in prison, expecting death, but the hour of release was at hand. And yet the offer which set him free was the direct cause of the only action in his life which there is any serious difficulty in defending. Byron had died in 1824 under a glamour of romance which added fuel to the noisy enthusiasm of his many admirers, and created

a universal desire to be further acquainted with the details of his stormy career. Under these circumstances the publisher, Colburn, applied, not unnaturally, to Leigh Hunt, with whom he made arrangements for a preface, critical and biographical, to a volume of selections from Byron's *Poems*. It appears that the money was paid in advance, and that Hunt, in the joy of re-union with old friends in England, neglected the work for a considerable period. When it was finally undertaken it assumed, for reasons unknown, a slightly different shape, and in 1828 appeared *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries, with Recollections of the Author's Life, and of his Visit to Italy*; being, in fact, reminiscences of Byron, Lamb, Shelley, Keats, Moore, Coleridge, etc., and a few chapters of autobiography.

It was hardly to be expected that this book should escape abuse. "It especially hurt the feelings," as Mr. J. Dykes Campbell once pointed out, "of many literary gentlemen who envied Hunt his opportunities of receiving ill-treatment at the hands of a lord." Leigh Hunt differed from the public in his estimate of Byron's genius, and more essentially in his conception of the personal relations between himself and the noble poet. He could never see any significance in the simple fact that he and his family had lived on Byron's money for some months. The arrangement had been forced upon him, against his own desire, by Byron's indolence about *The Liberal*, and he was constitutionally incapable of anticipating that anyone would refuse to accept his point of view, as soon as the facts were fully known. He was

writing, indeed, largely in self-justification to explain the facts, for his action had been freely criticised in various quarters. "I was at length," he says, "irritated by misrepresentations on the subject of Lord Byron to publish some autobiographical accounts of myself, and a refutation of matters relating to his lordship; but this only made matters worse; and it is inconceivable to what extent I suffered in mind, body, and estate, because the tide of affairs was against me, and because the public (which is not the best trait in their character) are inclined to believe whatever is said of a man by the prosperous." He had just cause for feeling bitter on the subject, and did not hesitate to exhibit, in all its petty meanness, the character of "his benefactor." Candid reviewers at once admitted that he had given "*a far clearer and more consistent view of the character of Lord Byron than any other writer*," but they seemed to feel that "these revelations" would have come with better grace from any other hand. This is undeniably true, but it should be remembered, on the contrary, that had *Lord Byron and his Contemporaries* never been written we should have lost, what some of us at least would be very unwilling to spare, a most intimate and life-like contemporary impression of the author of *Don Juan*; and a number of charges against Leigh Hunt would have remained unanswered, and, perhaps, unanswerable. No one else was both able and willing to conduct his defence, and he was thus driven to act as his own counsel.

Had he written with less resentment, the book would have lost its vivacity, and there is no reason to regret

any part of the affair but the heated and persistent abuse with which one of the most tolerant and humane of men has been loaded on account of it.

But in the meanwhile Leigh Hunt was rejoicing in England and his friends. "It was like a breakfast of milk and cream after yesterday's wine. . . . I used to stroll about the meadows half the day, with a book under my arm, generally a Parnaso or a Spenser, and wonder that I met nobody who seemed to like the fields as I did." His son tells us that at this time he was moving almost every year to some fresh abode—"at Epsom, at Old Brompton, St. John's Wood, and back to a house within three doors of the old room in the New Road." "From the noise and dust of the New Road," says the *Autobiography*, "my family removed to a corner in Chelsea, where the air of the neighbouring river was so refreshing, and the quiet of the 'no thoroughfare' so full of repose, that although our fortunes were at their worst, and my health almost of a piece with them, I felt for some weeks as if I could sit still for ever, embalmed in the silence. I got to like the very cries in the street for making me more aware of it by contrast. . . . The primitive cries of cowslips, primroses, and hot-cross buns seemed never to have quitted this sequestered region. They were like daisies in a bit of surviving field. There was an old seller of fish, in particular, whose cry of 'shrimps as large as prawns' was such a regular, long-drawn, and truly pleasing melody, that in spite of his hoarse, and, I am afraid, drunken voice, I used to wish for it of an evening, and hail it when it came. It lasted for some years ;

then faded, and went out ; I suppose with the poor old weather-beaten fellow's existence."

At Epsom he began *Sir Ralph Esher*, "the fictitious autobiography of a gentleman of the court of Charles II., including the adventures of another, and notices of Cromwell, the Puritans, and the Catholics." The publisher insisted that this work should be brought out as a novel, and it is not wholly "destitute of adventure," but the interest centres entirely on the manners of the court, which are very vividly portrayed. It was written under a curious agreement, by which Leigh Hunt sent up weekly instalments of copy to London for payment, always expecting to be told by the publisher, who would not pledge himself beforehand, that no more was wanted.

This was preceded during 1828 by *The Companion*, and followed by *The Chat of the Week*, 1830, and *The Tatler*, 1830-32, "a half-reviewing, half-theatrical periodical," set up "in a fit of anxiety at not being able to meet some obligations, and fearing I was going to be cut off from life itself without leaving answers to still graver wants," with the hope of "being able to realise some sudden as well as lasting profits."¹

"This was a very little work, consisting but of four folio pages ; but it was a daily publication. I did it all myself, except when too ill ; and illness seldom hindered me either from supplying the review of a book, going every night to the play, or writing the notice of the play the same night at the printing office. The consequence was that the work, slight as it looked, nearly killed me, for it never prospered beyond the coterie of play-going readers, to whom it was

¹ See Leigh Hunt's *London Journal*, No. 1.

almost exclusively known, and I was sensible of becoming weaker and poorer every day. When I came home at night, often at morning, I used to feel as if I could hardly speak, and for a year and a half afterwards a certain grain of fatigue seemed to pervade my limbs, which I thought would never go off. Such, nevertheless, is a habit of the mind, if it be but cultivated, that my spirits never seemed better, nor did I ever write theatricals so well, as in the pages of this most unremunerating speculation."

After this last spirited effort, in which he revived, with all the vigour of his youth, the tournament of Reform, Leigh Hunt never entered again into the arena of practical politics, or attempted to deal with current events outside pure literature. His domestic and financial anxieties were soothed by congenial work, and a truce to paper warfare. "The animosities are mortal, but the humanities live for ever," wrote Professor Wilson (Christopher North) in an article of generous recantation, and many were ready to echo his words. To the circle of Leigh Hunt's admirers were now added old enemies and new friends. Wordsworth and Moore subscribed to a volume of his poems, projected in 1831. Macaulay was ready with words and deeds of sympathy. Landor assisted him in the editorship of *The Monthly Repository*. Charles Knight was a landlord and a partner. The Carlyles, the Brownings, Barry Cornwall, Charles Dickens, John Forster, Laman Blanchard, and Sheridan Knowles, were among his intimates.

In 1834 he published, with Charles Knight, *The London Journal*, "a miscellany of essays, criticism, and passages from books," in which at last he had a perfectly

free hand, and gave himself unreservedly to literature. "Pleasure is the business of this journal," in which "he proposed to furnish ingenuous minds of all classes with such help as he possesses towards a share in the pleasures of taste and scholarship." He says himself that it "struck a note of too æsthetical a nature for cheap readers of those days," and it is certain that, for whatever reason, "after attaining the size of a goodly folio double volume, it terminated." It is a perfect and altogether delightful self-revelation, the most personal, the most literary, and the most kindly of periodicals. The editor is for ever welcoming you to his library, exhibiting his favourite authors, with the best passages underlined, and for a few minutes putting down the volume to give you the benefit of his own reflections.

Much of the material was afterwards reprinted in *The Seer; The Town; Men, Women, and Books; Imagination and Fancy; Wit and Humour; and One Hundred Romances of Real Life*. "I have also been pleased," he wrote, "to see that *The London Journal* maintains a good steady price with my old friends the bookstalls. It is in request, I understand, as a book for sea-voyages; and assuredly its large, triple-columned eight hundred pages, full of cheerful ethics, of reviews, anecdotes, legends, table-talk, and romances of real life, make a reasonable sort of library for a voyage, and must look pleasant enough lying among the bulky things upon deck."

He was contributing, meanwhile, to other papers, including *The Westminster Review*, and writing a certain amount of poetry, not particularly noteworthy, though

the verses on *Paganini*, and the charming *rondeau* (so-called) "Jenny kissed me," belong to this period. In 1840, his *Legend of Florence*, written many years before in six weeks, was accepted at Covent Garden, and achieved a certain measure of success:—

"Here I became acquainted for the first time with a green-room, and surrounded with a congratulating and cordial press of actors and actresses. But every step which I took into Covent Garden was pleasant from the first. One of the company, as excellent a woman as she was an actress, the late Mrs. Orger, whom I had the pleasure of knowing, brought me acquainted with the management; an old and esteemed friend was there to second her, in the person of the late Mr. Henry Robertson, the treasurer, brother too of our quondam young society of 'Elders,' and every way harmonious associate of many a musical party afterwards at the Novellos' and at Hampstead. Mr. Charles Matthews welcomed me with a cordiality like his own; Mr. Planché, the wit and fairy poet of the house, whom envy accused of being jealous of the approach of new dramatists, not only contributed everything in his power to assist in making me feel at home in it, but added the applause of his tears on my first reading of the play. To conclude my triumph in the green-room, when I read the play afterwards to its heroine, Miss Tree (now Mrs. Charles Kean), I had the pleasure of seeing the tears pour down her glowing cheeks, and of being told by her afterwards, that she considered her representation of the character her best performance. And finally, to crown all, in every sense of the word, loyal as well as metaphorical, the Queen did the play the honour of coming to see it twice (to my knowledge), four times according to that of Madame Vestris, who ought to have known. Furthermore, when Her Majesty saw it first, she was gracious and good-natured enough to express her approbation of it to the manager in words which she gave him permission to repeat to me; and furthermost of all, some years afterwards she ordered it to be repeated before her at Windsor Castle, thus giving me a local memory in the

place, which Surrey himself might have envied, and which Warton would certainly have hung, as a piece of tapestry, with a sonnet."

It was the beginning of a new era in which some measure of peace and prosperity came to the veteran writer. In 1844, he received an annuity of £120 from the Shelley family, in 1847 another of £200 from the Civil List, through the efforts of Macaulay, and we find him writing, "What a beatitude to find myself, at last, actually paying as I go, and incurring no more bills! I hardly seem to have yet recovered the delightful stunning of the security and the silence." It was at about this time that Dickens and other friends, including Forster, Leech, Cruikshank, Douglas Jerrold, Mark Lemon, and George Henry Lewes, arranged for the performance of *Every Man in his Humour* for Hunt's benefit; a scheme by which he profited to the extent of four hundred guineas.

It has been said, and with some measure of justice, that "if the author of *Bleak House* raised a thousand pounds for his old friend, he took the value of it, and infinitely more, out of him." It is impossible to prevent men saying, and even writing, that Harold Skimpole was drawn from Leigh Hunt. This is one of the half-truths which is worse than a lie. Dickens had always made free use of his own experience, painting his own father as Micawber, for instance, and in this case he wanted an "airy quality," something whimsical and attractive, for the character he had invented. "Hunt's philosophy of moneyed obligations, always, though loudly, half-jocosely

proclaimed, and his ostentatious wilfulness in the humouring of that or any other theme on which he cared for the time to expatiate," were at hand, and "partly for that reason, and partly, he has since grieved to think, for the pleasure it afforded him to find a delightful manner reproducing itself under his hand, he yielded to the temptation of too often making the character speak like his old friend.'" ¹ Dickens forgot that by associating these airy and recognisable qualities, with others that were utterly contemptible, he ran the risk of being suspected to mean the whole for Leigh Hunt. He evidently supposed that no one would know what he had been doing, but he did not attempt to rely on his own impressions, and actually revised the points of resemblance at the suggestion of Barry Cornwall and Forster.

When the book came out, however, the mischief was done. Leigh Hunt did not recognise himself, but friends were ready to open his eyes, and it was not very easy for Dickens to draw a satisfactory line between the borrowed and the invented traits of his character. The two men were quickly reconciled, and Hunt bore witness to an entire absence of resentment by contributing to *Household Words*, but this is not the end of the matter. Dickens's *Leigh Hunt* was more amusing, and far more comprehensible than the genuine article; the public accepted the "revelations," and did not trouble themselves to inquire further. The epithet of "Skimpolism" has been even adopted by critics for the explanation of any opinions and actions in which Leigh Hunt did not

¹ Forster's *Life of Dickens*.

adopt their standard. They are careless, like the novelist, and more culpable.

This is the only painful episode in Hunt's friendships, which were many and cordial. He was now a patriarch of letters, at whose shrine the young delighted to worship, around whose study chair all shades of opinion might be found to mingle. The Americans had found him out, both Hawthorne and Lowell printing records of their impressions, and we find a vivid picture of the man in Carlyle's letters and reminiscences.

"Hunt's house is a sort of 'poetical tinkering,' where the noble Hunt receives you in the spirit of a king, apologises for nothing, places you in the best seat, takes a window-sill himself if there is no other, and there folding closer his 'muslin cloud' of a printed night-gown in which he always writes, commences the liveliest dialogue on philosophy and the prospects of man (who is to be beyond measure 'happy' yet): which again he will courteously terminate the moment you are bound to go."

The visit is frequently returned :—

"Our commonest evening sitter, for a good while, was Leigh Hunt, who lived close by, and delighted to sit talking with us (free, cheery, idly melodious as bird on bough), or listening, with real feeling to her [Mrs. Carlyle's] old Scotch tunes on the piano, and winding up with a frugal morsel of Scotch porridge (endlessly admirable to Hunt). . . . Hunt was always accurately dressed these evenings, and had a fine, chivalrous, gentlemanly carriage, polite, affectionate, respectful (especially to her), and yet so free and natural. . . . His household, while at 4 Upper Cheyne Row, within a few steps of us here, almost at once disclosed itself to be hugger-mugger, unthrift and sordid collapse, once for all, and had to be associated with on cautious terms, while he himself emerged out of it in the chivalrous figure I describe. . . . He

would lean on his elbow against the mantelpiece (fine, clean, elastic figure, too, he had, five feet ten or more), and look round him nearly in silence, before taking leave for the night, 'as if I were a lar,' said he once, 'or permanent household god here' (such his polite, ærial-like way). Another time, rising from this lar attitude, he repeated (voice very fine) as if in sport of parody, yet with something of very sad perceptible, 'While I to sulphurous and penal fire' . . . as the last thing before vanishing."

It must be admitted that, whereas he was very responsive to sympathy and affection, few doses of flattery were too strong for him, and the most demonstrative effusiveness was acceptable. Mrs. Carlyle, and others, have been very severe on this trait, which is not the greatest in his character. But it is another side of the benevolence and sentimental humanity which constitutes the peculiar charm of both the man and his writings. Moreover, he had fought the good fight in his youth, and felt a hearty, if unfastidious, desire to enjoy the fruits.

His work at this time consisted, for the most part, of revision and revival. He collected, and to some extent arranged, his criticism, his gossip, his extracts, in *The Seer* ("Given at our suburban abode, with a fire on one side of us, and a vine at the window on the other, this 19th day of October, one thousand eight hundred and forty, in the green and invincible year of our life the fifty-sixth. — L. H."), and other miscellanies already mentioned.

During Southey's final attack of insanity he acted as a kind of amateur Laureate, and produced a number of pretty and sincerely loyal, if familiar, addresses to the

royal family. Macaulay suggested that he might succeed to the office on Southey's death, and he would have been entirely pleased to do so, but the superior claims of Wordsworth were recognised, and Leigh Hunt, who certainly felt no annoyance on the matter, lived to recommend Alfred Tennyson as his successor.

"With regard to the Laureateship," he wrote, Dec. 7, 1850, "the editor of this journal has particular reasons for wishing to give his opinion on the subject in his own person; and his opinion is, that if the office in future is really to be bestowed on the highest degree of poetical merit, and on that only (as, being a solitary office, it unquestionably ought to be, though such has not hitherto been the case), then Mr. Alfred Tennyson is entitled to it above any other man in the kingdom; since of all living poets he is the most gifted with the sovereign poetical faculty, Imagination. May he live to wear his laurel to a green old age; singing congratulations to Queen Victoria and human advancement, long after the writer of these words shall have ceased to hear him with mortal ears."

The words appear in *Leigh Hunt's Journal*, the last of his editorial efforts, a revival of the *London Journal*, which only survived a few months. It contains his second and last published drama, *Lovers' Amazements*, which was produced at the Lyceum, January 20, 1858.

"The audience called for me with the same fervour as on the appearance of the *Legend of Florence*, and I felt myself again, as it were, in the warm arms of my fellow-creatures, unmistaken, and never to be morbidised more."

Three other plays of his still exist in manuscript, and are described at some length in the *Autobiography*:—*The Prince's Marriage*; *The Double*; *Look to Your Morals*.

Leigh Hunt records with justifiable pride that at this time he was not aware of having a single enemy, and he had lost none of his powers of sympathetic enjoyment.

“The same unvaried day saw me reading or writing, ailing, jesting, reflecting, rarely stirring from home but to walk, interested in public events, in the progress of society, in the *New Reformation* (most deeply), in things great and small, in a print, in a plaster-caste, in a hand-organ, in the stars, in the sun to which the sun was hastening, in the flower on my table, in the fly on my paper while I wrote. (He crossed words, of which he knew nothing; and perhaps we all do as much every moment over things of the divinest meaning.) I read everything that was readable, old and new, particularly fiction and philosophy and natural history; was always returning to something Italian, or in Spenser, or in the themes of the East; lost no particle of Dickens, of Thackeray, of Mrs. Gaskell (whose *Mary Barton* gave me emotions that required more and more the consideration of the good which it must do); called out every week for my *Family Herald*, a little penny publication, at that time qualified to inform the best of its contemporaries; rejoiced in republications of wise and witty Mrs. Gore, especially seeing she only made us wait for something newer; delighted in the inexhaustible wit of Douglas Jerrold, Thackeray, and his coadjutors Tom Taylor, Percival Leigh, and others; in *Punch*, the best-humoured and best-hearted satirical publication that ever existed; wondered when Bulwer Lytton would give us more of his potent romances and prospective philosophies; and hailed every fresh publication of James, though I knew half what he was going to do with his lady, his gentleman, and his landscape, and his mystery, and his orthodoxy, and his criminal trial. But I was charmed with the new amusement which he brought out of old materials. I looked on him as I should look upon a musician, famous for ‘variations.’ I was grateful for his vein of cheerfulness, for his singularly varied and vivid landscapes, for his power of painting women at once lady-like and loving (a rare talent), for his making lovers to match, at

once beautiful and well-bred, and for the solace which all this has afforded me, sometimes over and over again, in illness and in convalescence, when I required interest without violence, and entertainment at once animated and mild."

Some consolations were needed, for towards the end of his life he had to suffer two bereavements, in consequence of which he "seemed to belong as much to the next world as to this." His favourite son Vincent, "one of the most amiable, interesting, and sympathising of human beings," died in October, 1852. At the beginning of 1857 followed "the partner of his life for more than half a century." "May all of us who desire to meet elsewhere do so, and be then shown the secret of the great, awful, yet, it is to be trusted, the beautiful riddle."

For himself the end was not far distant. He was revising the second edition of his *Autobiography*, contributing a series of papers called the *Occasional* to the *Spectator*, assisting to vindicate the memory of Shelley, and visiting a few of his oldest friends, when, on the 28th of August, 1859, at the house of Charles Reynell, the printer, in Putney, his long and busy life was happily finished. It had been his desire to be buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, and there a simple monument to his memory may be found.

"Although his bodily powers had been giving way," writes his son, "his most conspicuous qualities—his memory for books, and his affection—remained; and when his hair was white, when his ample chest had grown slender, when the very proportion of his height had visibly lessened, his step was still steady, and his dark

eyes brightened at every happy expression and at every thought of kindness. His death was simply exhaustion : he broke off his work to lie down and repose. So gentle was the final approach that he scarcely recognised it till the very last, and then it came without terrors. His physical suffering had not been severe ; at the latest hour he said that his only 'uneasiness' was failing breath, and that failing breath was used to express his sense of the inexhaustible kindness of the family who had been so unexpectedly made his nurses, to draw from one of his sons, by minute, eager, and searching questions, all that he could learn about the latest vicissitudes and growing hopes of Italy, to ask the friends and children around him for news of those he loved, and to send love and messages to the absent who loved him."

II.—JOURNALIST.

A VERY brief résumé of the relations between literature and journalism in England from the earliest times may form a basis from which to judge of Leigh Hunt's position and work. "Almost from the first," says Mr. H. R. Fox-Bourne, in his interesting *English Newspapers*, "journalists attempted to be critics as well as news-mongers. . . . Defoe, in his *Review*, greatly developed this branch of journalism, and some others as well, and he had famous rivals and imitators in Steele and Addison, who, however, as did some of their successors, like Johnson and Goldsmith, generally preferred social and literary questions to politics, and, affecting to despise newspapers, delivered themselves in essay sheets like *The Spectator*, which were not newspapers, or in weekly miscellanies like *The Universal Chronicle*. It was Defoe again, more than anyone else, who, in *Mist's Journal* and other papers made it customary to give news and elaborate comments in the same journal, and the plan was hardly improved upon till John and Leigh Hunt started *The Examiner*. The first newspapers, being published weekly, provided nothing but such news as they could collect. When, early in the eighteenth century, daily newspapers began, they continued to pro-

vide little more than news, leaving it for the newer and generally short-lived weekly papers, either to provide essays and critical articles alone, as in the case of *The Spectator*, *The Connoisseur*, and some hundreds of others, or to enliven their reports of events, obtained at second hand, with a few columns of original writing, as in the case of *Mist's*, *Read's*, and other journals. The dailies began to usurp what was then regarded as the function of the weeklies when such letters as Junius's appeared in *The Public Advertiser*, and before the end of George III.'s reign every paper of importance had its leading articles, its theatrical notices, and perhaps even its reviews of books and miscellaneous essays, as well as its reports of domestic and foreign occurrences, of parliamentary debates and public meetings, for all of which much ampler space than formerly was afforded by the enlarged size of the sheets."

When Leigh Hunt entered the profession, indeed, the weeklies were at a discount, and the leading editors were Perry of *The Morning Chronicle*, Daniel Stuart of *The Morning Post*, and the second John Walter of *The Times*. Daniel Stuart was to retire in a few years, but, during the first days of *The Examiner*, he had the most distinguished contributors:—Coleridge for politics and philosophy, Southey to help him out on these subjects and share the poet's corner with Wordsworth, and Lamb to supply funny paragraphs at 6d. apiece. (*The London Magazine* was not started till 1820.) Lamb and Coleridge wrote also for the *Chronicle* in company with Moore, Campbell, and Macintosh. Walter took the lead by different

methods. He secured good writing without the help of great writers, and was already embarked upon that course of independent and practical enterprise which led to the establishment of the steam press in 1814.

It is well to note that *The Edinburgh Review* began in 1802; *The Quarterly* and *Blackwood*, Hunt's persistent foes, were started in 1809 and 1817 respectively; while the weekly rivals of *The Examiner*, such as *The Atlas*, and its successor, *The Spectator*, arose in 1826 and 1828.

Leigh Hunt's earliest attempts at journalism had been a series of contributions, over the signature "Mr. Town, Junior: Critic and Censor-general," to *The Traveller*, afterwards incorporated in *The Globe*, "a bold advocate of political reforms," the organ of commercial travellers, but appealing, under the editorship of Quin, to a much larger and more intelligent class of readers than those for whom it was specifically published. Hunt's papers of miscellaneous criticism were in direct imitation of Messrs. Colman and Bonnel Thornton, the senior "Mr. Town" of *The Connoisseur*, who themselves copied Goldsmith, with "no pretensions to his genius, but possessing great animal spirits, which are a sort of merit in this climate." He was immensely pleased with his perquisite of five or six copies of the paper, and "luckily the essays were little read."

Meanwhile, his elder brother John, who had been apprenticed to Reynell the printer, was beginning life on his own account, and had energetically determined to bring out a Liberal newspaper. He projected *The Statesman*, but this passed into other hands; and in

1805 he published *The News*,¹ inviting the young Leigh to contribute some theatrical criticism. It was the real beginning of his professional career, for these papers, however juvenile and conceited, were inspired by the circumstances and principles which may be traced in all his journalistic work.

There is further ground, moreover, for dwelling at some length upon these theatrical criticisms. Mr. William Archer, who has lately edited² a well-chosen selection from Hunt's *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres* (itself in part reprinted from *The News* and from *The Tatler*), opines that he may "be reckoned the first English dramatic critic." He was actually "the first critical journalist who succeeded in emerging from the mists of anonymity. Probably he was the first who deserved to emerge." It is further to be observed that all previous criticism of any permanent value had been reminiscent. Good Mr. Pepys, of course, recorded his impressions of the drama with a decision and promptitude worthy of a journalist of to-day; but his utterances are few, and, except for occasional anecdotes or scraps of correspondence, we have to depend for our impressions of the stage during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the records of "men, looking back, at some distance of time, upon performances which have pleased and impressed them."

In Leigh Hunt's days, indeed, there were professional critics of a kind, gentlemen who "did the theatres" after

¹ That is, he printed and apparently edited it for the proprietors.

² With the late Mr. Robert W. Lowe. Walter Scott.

a fashion described, with perfect justice, in the *Autobiography*, by way of contrast to his own methods :—

“ Puffing and plenty of tickets were the system of the day. It was an interchange of amenities over the dinner-table ; a flattery of power on the one side, and puns on the other ; and what the public took for a criticism on a play was a draft upon the box-office, or reminiscences of last Thursday’s salmon and lobster-sauce. The custom was to write as short and as favourable a paragraph on the new piece as could be ; to say that Bannister was ‘ excellent,’ and Mrs. Jordan ‘ charming ’ ; to notice the ‘ crowded house,’ or invent it if necessary ; and to conclude by observing that ‘ the whole went off with *éclat*.’ For the rest, it was a critical religion in those times to admire Mr. Kemble ; and at the period in question Master Betty had appeared, and been hugged to the hearts of the town as the young Roscius. We saw that independence in theatrical criticism would be a great novelty. We announced it, and nobody believed us ; we stuck to it, and the town believed everything we said. The proprietors of *The News*, of whom I knew so little that I cannot recollect with certainty any one of them, very handsomely left me to myself. My retired and scholastic habits kept me so ; and the pride of success confirmed my independence with regard to others. . . . *To know an actor personally appeared to me a vice not to be thought of ; and I would as lief have taken poison as accepted a ticket from the theatres.*”

There was a good deal of bluster in his mood, but its essential spirit was high-minded and courageous. He did honestly determine to form his own opinions, and to express them frankly, sparing no trouble for either process. “ The managers,” says Mr. A. Andrews, in his *History of British Journalism*, “ were startled by the apparition of this boy critic who stood haughtily aloof from them,

wrapped up in reserve, and ostentatiously impartial. . . . Leigh went honestly to the theatre, sat out the performance, and wrote his candid opinion. This course did not make him popular among the actors, but it raised the circulations of *The News*."

Leigh Hunt had always frequented the theatres, since his first sight of a play in March 1800, and he was interested in the drama as literature. The times unfortunately were not prolific of good work. The old masterpieces were performed frequently, and sometimes by men and women of genius, but the new playwrights, Cherry, Dibdin, and Reynolds, were unworthy of serious attention. Among actors, on the other hand, he saw many of note—"The Clan Kemble was at its zenith"—Dora Jordan, Bannister, King, John Liston "from Newcastle," Cooke, Young, Emery, Fawcett, Munden, Miss Betterton, and their colleagues, were on the boards. Of these the town had its favourites, and Hunt was ready enough to attack them. He was more often right than wrong, and, whatever the dangers of a free lance, we must admire a certain healthy freshness in the downright abuse, for instance, with which he rails at Pope's clap-trap, and Kemble's "vicious orthoepy." The charge of occasional pertness towards actresses cannot be gainsaid. It arose from his tropical temperament and irresponsible boyishness, and must not be confounded with any disrespect or bad taste *in feeling*. Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse has judiciously quoted, in contrast, the "wholly charming picture" of Mrs. Jordan :—

“ Her laughter is the happiest and most natural on the stage ; if she is to laugh in the middle of a speech it does not separate itself so abruptly from her words as with most of our performers. . . . Her laughter intermingles itself with her words as fresh ideas afford her fresh merriment ; she does not so much indulge as she seems unable to help it ; it increases, it lessens with her fancy, and when you expect it no longer according to the usual habit of the stage, it sparkles forth at little intervals as recollection revives it, like flame from half-smothered embers.”

The essential characteristics of Hunt's dramatic criticism are its sincerity, independence, and vivacity. His praise is neither bought nor borrowed, and has therefore, in all its crudity, a certain value. He was full of spirit, moreover, and keenly alive to new impressions ; the brilliancy of scenic effects and the glow of crowds affected his imagination and inspired his pen. Under the softening influences of experience he grew less opinionative, and became, to some extent, a recognised authority. His criticisms appeared in *The News* (1805-1807), and in *The Examiner*, until about the end of 1813, when he wearied of the subject, or was engrossed by others. He returned to the charge with renewed zeal and delight in *The Tatler* 1830-1832.

Encouraged apparently by the success of *The News*, the brothers Hunt determined themselves to turn proprietors, and on January 3, 1808, appeared the first number of a new paper under Leigh's editorship—*The Examiner: A Sunday Paper on Politics, Domestic Economy, and Theatricals*. Price 8½d. From this time forward Leigh Hunt was almost continually engaged in

managing or contributing to periodicals, but his first effort stands alone as being, for a time at least, financially successful and politically influential. Its programme was reform, literature, and the fine arts.

Politically, *The Examiner* was the more worthy follower of Cobbett's *Political Register*, against whose noisy agitation it frequently protested. Taking his motto from Swift—"Party is the madness of the many for the gain of the few"—the editor professed to be of no party, and shrank from intercourse with politicians and placemen, as he had formerly avoided the denizens of the stage.

"A crowd is no place for steady observation," it is written in *The Prospectus*; "*The Examiner* has escaped from the throng and the bustle, but he will seat himself by the wayside, and contemplate the moving multitudes as they wrangle and wrestle along. He does not mean to be as noisy as the objects of his contemplation, or to abuse them for a bustle which resistance merely increases, or even to take notice of those mischievous wags who might kick the mud towards him as they drive along; but the more rational part of the multitude will be obliged to him, when he warns them of an approaching shower, or invites them to sit down with him and rest themselves, or advises them to take care of their pockets. As to the language and style in which this advice will be given, it would be ridiculous to promise that which haste or the headache might hinder him from performing. Perhaps it must still be left to statesmen to amuse in politics."

Leigh Hunt declared that though, "from family associations," he soon became interested in politics as a man, he never could love them as a writer. "It was against

the grain that I was encouraged to begin them ; and against the grain that I ever afterwards sat down to write, except when the subject was of a very general description, and I could introduce philosophy and the belles lettres." Such matters as he did touch upon were always, to his mind, questions of right and wrong ; he was ever the champion of the oppressed, the censor of them that sit in high places. "*The Examiner* began with being of no party ; but reform soon gave it one. It disclaimed all knowledge of statistics, and *the rest of its politics were rather a sentiment and a matter of general training than founded on any particular political reflection.* It possessed the benefit, however, of a good deal of general reading. It never wanted examples out of history and biography, and a kind of adornment from the spirit of literature ; and it gradually drew to its perusal many intelligent persons of both sexes, who would, perhaps, never have attended to politics under other circumstances." Though preferring the Whigs to the Tories, it was thoroughly in sympathy with neither, and rather advocated the views of "those newer and more thorough-going Whigs, which were known by the name of Radicals, and have since been called Whig-Radicals and Liberals. The opinions of *The Examiner*, in fact, both as to State and Church government, allowing, of course, for difference of position in the parties, and tone in their manifestation, were those that have since swayed the destinies of the country in the persons of Queen Victoria and her ministers."

During its warfare with the Tories, it "was charged with Buonapartism, with Republicanism, with disaffection to

Church and State, with conspiracy at the tables of Burdett, and Cobbett, and Henry Hunt." Such accusations were as inevitable as they were unjust. Of his three political contemporaries here mentioned, Leigh Hunt knew personally nothing ; he certainly despised all conspirators, and respected law and order. He thought little of Buonapart's intellectual powers, and was naturally disgusted by many traits in his character ; though admiring him as a soldier, and objecting to England's interference with his policy.

"I am no republican," he says in the *Autobiography*, "nor ever was, though I have lived during a period of history when kings themselves tried hard to make honest men republicans by their apparent unteachableness. But my own education, the love perhaps of poetic ornament, and the dislike which I had conceived at that time of an existing republic, even of British origin, kept me within the pale of the loyal. *I might prefer, perhaps, a succession of queens to kings, and a simple fillet on their brows to the most gorgeous diadem.* I think that men more willingly obey the one, and I am sure that nobody could mistake the cost of the other."

But if such were not Hunt's opinions he held others almost equally objectionable in certain quarters. "In its first year," says Mr. Monkhouse, "*The Examiner* showed its teeth on the subjects of reform, Catholic emancipation, cant and corruption generally, and spared neither court nor cabinet ; but its chief object of attack was the war policy of the ministers." This fairly represents Leigh Hunt's attitude throughout his political career, in which, as we have seen, he gained deservedly a

considerable influence among the more advanced spirits of the day, and was honoured by much abuse and persecution from his opponents. His leading articles, though always vigorous and sincere, were more remarkable for their unexpected literary allusions than for any profundity of thought or brilliance of style. In most cases his philippics were abundantly justified, but it cannot be denied that an ardent temperament and honest zeal led him sometimes to confound opinions with motives. He continued to edit *The Examiner* during his imprisonment and until he went to Italy in 1821; but the grip of the law taught him a certain degree of prudence, without in any way sapping his principles; and it is probable that in the seclusion of Horsemonger Lane he lost touch with the complexities of political life. His interest only once revived, during his editorship of *The Tatler*, and the *Autobiography* tells little of this aspect of his career.

But on matters more fully treated elsewhere, and always congenial to Hunt, *The Examiner* was not altogether silent. A good deal of space was devoted to notices of the drama, the fine arts, and new books; while the editor always welcomed reminiscences of standard literature and original contributions by neglected men of genius. Leigh Hunt himself has dwelt with affectionate pride upon this side of the work in an article entitled "Explanation and Retrospection—*The Examiner* Twenty Years Ago," which appeared in *The Monthly Repository*, October, 1837:—

"It was the Robin Hood of its cause, plunder excepted; and by


the gaiety of its daring, its love of the green places of poetry, and its sympathy with all who needed sympathy, produced many a brother champion that beat it at its own weapons. Hazlitt, in its pages, first made the public sensible of his great powers. There Keats and Shelley were first made known to the lovers of the beautiful. There Charles Lamb occasionally put forth a piece of criticism worth twenty of the editor's, though a value was found in those also."

His own more important miscellaneous contributions were, *The Round Table*, written with Hazlitt, 1815-1817; *Proæter-Natural History*, 1819; *Sketches of Living Poets*—Bowles, Byron, Campbell, Coleridge, 1821; and *The Wishing-Cap*, 1824-1825.

After Leigh Hunt left *The Examiner* in 1821, it fell upon evil days. His brother John was again in prison, and the editorship was undertaken by his nephew, Henry Leigh Hunt, who was too young for the work. From him it passed into the hands of Dr. Fellowes, a wealthy, enthusiastic; and noble-hearted Radical without a talent for journalism. It revived in 1826 under Albany Fonblanque, of whom Leigh Hunt writes gracefully:—"He had all the wit for which I toiled, without making any pretensions to it. He was, indeed, the genuine successor, not of me, but of the Swifts and Addisons themselves; profuse of wit even beyond them, and superior in political knowledge." The new editor was undoubtedly vigorous and able. "Let us endeavour," he wrote, "steadily and perseveringly to gain the comparatively small space of ground immediately before us, neither discouraged by real difficulties nor resting our reliance on vain

hopes, and trusting to nothing but our own energy and constancy, which will carry us, with small means, to the attainment of great objects." In 1867 it was sold to M'Cullagh Towers, and degenerated from 6d. to 3d., from respectability to dishonour. A sanguine Radical acquired the paper in 1870, and endeavoured to create a rival to *The Spectator* and *The Saturday Review*, an ambition to some extent realised under the brilliant conduct of H. R. Fox-Bourne, who became its editor in 1871, and inherited the talent and enthusiasm of its original projectors. In the autumn of 1873 it was sold to P. A. Taylor, and afterwards to Lord Rosebery. Among its most recent editors were William Minto and R. Williams, but its day was over, and in 1880 it vanished ingloriously from the field. Certain literary associations, which would have been very grateful to Leigh Hunt, belong to comparatively modern days. Swinburne's *Diræ* appeared first in the columns of *The Examiner*, and among its contributors were J. S. Mill, H. D. Traill, W. Minto, R. Garnett, Mrs. Fawcett, and Miss Frances Power Cobbe. Nine days after the death of Mill, on May 17, 1873, was published a remarkable double number, containing estimates of his work and character by Herbert Spencer, Cairnes, Frederic Harrison, Henry Fawcett, W. T. Thornton, W. A. Hunter, William Minto, and others.

It will be of interest to-day to notice briefly the contents and arrangements of an ordinary number of *The Examiner* in the early days of Hunt's editorship. It was a quarto in sixteens printed in two columns, the type rather smaller than that of our present news-

papers. It opens with a leading article on a political topic always written, except in case of illness, by the editor, and headed *The Political Examiner*, bearing his sign-manual, "the indicative hand"—. The next item is news—foreign, Irish, provincial, agricultural, or "The Imperial Parliament," followed by *The London Gazette*, that is official despatches, announcements of bankruptcies, etc. Finance is occasionally allowed to occupy a line thus:—"Price of Stocks on Saturday, 3 per cent., cons. . . . $62\frac{3}{8}\frac{1}{2}$ omnium . . . $\frac{5}{8}$ dis." Here follows a sub-title, "*The Examiner*," over minor articles and paragraphs, similar in character to those on the middle page of to-day's *Times*, for example, but usually dealing with foreign affairs. The later pages are occupied with "Court and Fashionables," "Theatrical Examiner," "The Fine Arts," "Notices of New Books," "Correspondence," "The Army, Police, Accidents, and Offences, etc.," "Births, Deaths, and Marriages." There are no advertisements; no accounts of prize-fights, cock-fights, and races; no page of markets; and, "above all, the new paper," says *The Prospectus*, "shall not be disgraced by those abandoned hypocrites, whose greatest quackery is their denial of being quacks. Their vile indecency shall not gloat through the mask of philanthropy, sickness shall not be flattered into incurability, nor debauchery indulged to the last gasp by the promises of instant restoration. If the paper cannot be witty or profound, it shall at least never be profligate."

The promise was kept, and, with the exception of the reports of trials, which were neither more nor less sensa-

tional than those of our most respectable present dailies, there was only one small item in the paper, and that occurred but seldom, which could distress the most fastidious :—*The Examiner*, like its contemporaries, was willing to record the birth of all monstrosities, triplets, and the like.

A kindred, but entirely harmless and amusing, eccentricity was the insertion of gossiping obituaries and tales of courtship under “Deaths” and “Marriages.” On April 19, 1812, for instance, we read :—

“Last week, in Lincolnshire, Colonel Dupree, to Miss N. Trollope, with a fortune of £12,000. Miss T. fell in love with him while he was on parade with the soldiers. The next morning she communicated her sentiments to him, which he joyfully accepted, and on the following day she was led to the altar.”

The Examiner, however, was not literary enough to occupy Hunt’s whole mind, and we find him from 1810-1812 editing also a quarterly, *The Reflector : A Collection of Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects of Literature and Politics, written by the Editor of The Examiner, with the Assistance of Various Other Hands*. Politics were admitted into this journal “because they are now, in their turn, exhibiting their reaction upon literature, as literature in the preceding age exhibited its action upon them.” It promised a retrospect of the quarterly events, and an essay or two upon domestic policy, viewing the times in an historical light ; but the principal feature was to be miscellaneous literature, “consisting of essays on men and manners, inquiries into past and present litera-

ture, and all subjects relative to wit, morals, and a true refinement."

In this venture Hunt had valuable assistance from Lamb, Dyer, Barnes, the Greek Professor Scholefield, and the Aikin family; but the best writers, as he was continually discovering, cannot float a magazine without capital or business talent, and only four numbers were ever published. *The Reflector*, however, has two claims upon a grateful posterity. It includes no less than seven immortal essays by Lamb, among others, "The Inconveniences of Being Hanged;" and in its pages Hunt himself first achieved, in "A Day by the Fire," that rare union of delicate and playful sentiment in the "miscellaneous" essay, on which his chief claims to reputation undoubtedly rest.

A few years later, in 1819, he published a new periodical, *The Indicator*, almost entirely devoted to this type of work, of which it contains the most successful examples. *The Indicator*, price 2d., appeared every Wednesday from October 13, 1819, to March 21, 1821, when it was continued by other hands until October; Leigh Hunt himself resuming the title for essays in *The Literary Examiner*, 1823 (Nos. 77, 78, 80-4; Nos. 79, 75-88 not being his), and for the last time in *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1832 (No. 89). Each number contained an essay by the editor, and a few miscellaneous notes.

"It is the object of this periodical work," says No. 1, "to notice any subjects whatsoever within the range of the editor's knowledge

or reading. He will take them up as they happen to suggest themselves ; and endeavour to point out their essence to the reader, so as to be at once brief and satisfactory. . . . *The Indicator* will attend to no subject whatsoever of immediate or temporary interest. His business is with the honey in the old woods. The editor has enough to agitate his spirits, during the present eventful times, in another periodical work ; and he is willing to be so agitated ; but as he is accustomed to use his pen, as habitually as a bird his pinions, and to betake himself with it into the nests and bowers of more lasting speculations, when he has done with public ones, he is determined to keep those haunts of his recreation free from all noise and wrangling, both for his own pleasure, and for those who may choose to accompany him."

About this time (1819-22) he edited *The Literary Pocket-Book*, an annual designed "to furnish a pocket memorandum book for intellectual observers and persons of taste," containing "The Calendar of the Seasons" and verses by himself, Shelley, Keats, and Procter ; and contributed various pieces to *The New Monthly Magazine*.

Then came the ill-fated journey to Italy in order to establish *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South*, 1822-3. The combination of Byron's brilliance and Hunt's experience promised well, and the defenders of orthodoxies and legitimacy were seized with alarm. They blew the trumpet of the new review by violent and prophetic abuse, but they might have spared their breath. "Mr. Percy Shelley, a writer of infidel poetry, was drowned," as the newspapers had it, and the remaining partners could not work together. Byron's entire loss of interest in the scheme and Hunt's imprudence resulted in a publication, certain to give offence in every

quarter, containing a few brilliant items in a heterogeneous mass of second-rate material. Only four numbers appeared, including "The Vision of Judgment," "Letter to the Editor of *My Grandmother's Review*," "Heaven and Earth," "The Blues," and a fine translation of Pulci's "Morgante Maggiore" by Byron; a translation of "Walpurgis Nacht," and the exquisite "I arise from Dreams of Thee" by Shelley; "My First Acquaintance with the Poets" by Hazlitt; and a few of the editor's admirable short poems.

The bulk of Hunt's work in Italy, however, was very inferior. He was out of spirits, and could only achieve any success by dreaming of England, as in the charming "Wishing-Cap Papers" contributed to *The Examiner*, 1824 and 1825.

During the preparation of *Lord Byron and his Contemporaries*, after his return home, he brought out *The Companion*, a weekly periodical precisely similar to *The Indicator*, but, like most "second thoughts," not so excellent. The first number appeared on January 9, 1828, and on July 23 of the same year the editor bade his readers farewell. By 1830, however, he was once more in full harness, embarked on what proved to be the most arduous of all his journalistic undertakings. He then began *The Chat of the Week: A Compendium of all Topics of Public Interest, Original and Select*. Price 6d.; changed in No. 8 to *The Chat of the Week and Gazette of Literature, Fine Arts, and Theatricals*. Price 7d. But, in this enlarged form, a stamp was required by Government, which Hunt could not afford, and he, therefore,

dropped this weekly, and started *The Tatler: A Daily Journal of Literature and the Stage*. *The Chat of the Week* survived from June 5 to August 28, 1830; *The Tatler* from September 4, 1830, to February 13, 1832. The latter contained four folio pages, and, except in case of illness, *was written entirely by himself*. It is not surprising that it nearly killed him, and one can only wonder that much of the writing, particularly the theatrical criticism, was so good.

He says that the official interference with *The Chat of the Week* had made him very angry:—

“I tilted against governments and aristocracies, and kings and princes in general, always excepting King William, for whom I had regard as a Reformer, and Louis Philippe, whom I fancied to be a philosopher. I also got out of patience with my old antagonists, the Tories, to whom I resolved to give as good as they brought, and I did so, and stopped every new assailant. A daily paper, however small, is a weapon that gives an immense advantage, you can make your attacks in it so often. However, I always ceased as soon as my antagonists did.”

During the next few years the overworked editor contented himself with contributing to *Bull's Court Magazine* the somewhat tiresome “Year of Honeymoons;” to *Tait's Magazine* a second series of “Wishing-Cap Papers;” and to *The True Sun Daily Review* a number of miscellaneous essays which never attracted much notice.

In 1834, however, he was ready with the most characteristic of all his periodicals:—*Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, “to assist the Inquiring, animate the

Struggling, and sympathise with All," comprising a Great Variety of Original Articles of an Instructive and Entertaining Character, by Leigh Hunt, Esq., and Many of his Esteemed Literary Friends. A Weekly Paper. Price 1½d.

1834, 1835. It was published for old association's sake on Wednesday, the day on which Lamb had been always "at home,"¹ to certain choice spirits of his generation, and which had been made, he used to say, "the sweetest day in the week," by the publication of *The Indicator*. Hunt also revived the "Wednesdays" in honour of another Charles, his friend Ollier. "Are there to be no Wednesdays this summer?" he wrote as late as 1857, "or rather no Ollierdays, for you know how the list of the week-days used to run—Monday, Tuesday, Ollierday, Thursday; etc." Charles Knight undertook the business management, and Hunt enjoyed the luxury of saying just what he pleased without anxiety or fear of abuse. The veteran journalist's had become to some extent a name to conjure with; he had been so long before the public, his countenance smiling through all disaster, that mutual recriminations were at an end. "How pleasant it is," he writes, "to find oneself reconciled to men whom we have ignorantly undervalued, and to have lived long enough to say so."

"Pleasure is the business of this *Journal*: we own it: we love to begin with the word: it is like commencing the day (as we are now commencing it) with sunshine in the room. Pleasure for all who can

¹ See Hazlitt's *Plain Speaker*, his essay *On Persons one would wish to have seen*, and Lamb's *Letters*.

receive pleasure ; consolation and encouragement for the rest ; this is our device. But then it is pleasure like that implied by our simile, innocent, kindly, we dare to add, instructive and elevating. Nor shall the graver aspects of it be wanting. As the sunshine floods the sky and ocean, and yet nurses the baby buds of the roses on the wall, so we would fain open the largest and the very least sources of pleasure, the noblest that expands above us into the heavens, and the most familiar that catches our glance in the homestead. We would break open the surfaces of habit and indifference, of objects that are supposed to contain nothing but so much brute-matter, or commonplace utility, and show what treasures they conceal. Man has not yet learned to enjoy the world he lives in ; no, not the hundred-thousand-millionth part of it ; and we would fain help him to render it productive of still greater joy, and to delight or comfort himself in his task as he proceeds. We would make adversity hopeful, prosperity sympathetic, all kinder, richer, and happier. And we have some right to assist in the endeavour, for there is scarcely a single joy or sorrow within the experience of our fellow-creatures which we have not tasted ; and the belief in the good and the beautiful has never forsaken us. It has been medicine to us in sickness, riches in poverty, and the best part of all that ever delighted us in health and success. . . .

“The commonest goods and chattels are pregnant [to the wise man] as fairy tales, or things in a pantomime. His hat, like Fortunatus’ wishing-cap, carries him into the American solitudes among the beavers, where he sits in thought, looking at them during their work, and hearing the majestic whispers in the trees, or the falls of the old trunks that are everlastingly breaking the silence in those wildernesses. His coat shall carry him, in ten minutes, through all the scenes of pastoral life and mechanical, the quiet fields, the sheep-shearing, the feasting, the love-making, the downs of Dorsetshire, and the streets of Birmingham, where, if he meet with pain in his sympathy, he also, in his knowledge, finds reason for hope and encouragement, and for giving his manly assistance to the common good. The very toothpick of the *dandy*, should this man, or any man like him, meet with it, poor or rich, shall suggest

to him, if he pleases, a hundred agreeable thoughts of foreign lands, and elegance and amusement, of tortoises and books of travel, and the comb of his mistress's hair, and the elephants that carry sultans, and the real silver mines of Potosi, with all the wonders of South American history, and the starry cross in its sky ; so that the smallest key shall pick the lock of the greatest treasures ; and that which in the hands of the possessor was only a poor instrument of affectation and the very emblem of indifference and stupidity, shall open to the knowing man a universe.

“ We must not pursue the subject further this week, or trust our eyes at the smallest objects around us, which, from long and loving contemplation, have enabled us to report their riches. We have been at this work now, off and on, man and boy (for we began essay-writing while in our teens), for upwards of thirty years : and excepting that we fain would have done far more, and that experience and suffering have long restored to us the natural kindliness of boyhood, and put an end to a belief in the right or utility of severer views of anything or person, we feel the same as we have done throughout ; and we have the same hope, the same love, the same faith in the beauty and goodness of nature and all her prospects, in space and in time ; we could almost add, if a sprinkle of white hairs in our black would allow us, the same youth ; for whatever may be thought of a consciousness to that effect, the feeling is so real, and trouble of no ordinary kind has so remarkably spared the elasticity of our spirits, that we are often startled to find how old we have become, compared with the little age that is in our disposition ; and we mention this to bespeak the reader's faith in what we shall write hereafter, if he is not acquainted with us already. If he is, he will no more doubt us than the children do at our fire-side. We have had so much sorrow, and yet are capable of so much joy, and receive pleasure from so many familiar objects, that we sometimes think we should have had an unfair portion of happiness if our life had not been one of more than ordinary trial. . . .

“ We believe we may call ourselves the father of the present penny and three-halfpenny literature—designations once distressing ‘ to ears polite,’ but now no longer so, since they are producing so many

valuable results, fortunes included . . . And now once more setting up a periodical work, entirely without politics, but better calculated, we trust, than our former ones, to meet the wishes of many as well as few, we are in hearty good earnest the public's very sincere and cordial friend and servant."

In this last ambition he was destined, unfortunately, to receive yet another disappointment. *The London Journal* was too entirely reflective and gossiping, not to say egoistic ; it took no note of what was passing around it, and, in the hurry of the moment, was left behind. The bound volume, however, forms a princely folio, over which every honest book-lover must delight to linger. Without subscribing altogether to the untempered enthusiasm of Mr. Launcelot Cross's really diligent and instructive *Characteristics of Leigh Hunt as exhibited in that Typical Literary Periodical, Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, we may say without reservation that its pages, abounding in happy appreciations, genial nature sketches, and quaint narratives, contain an immense variety of attractive matter in an eminently readable shape.

Every number opened with one of the editor's miscellaneous essays—on "A Stone," "A Pinch of Snuff," or "Life after Death," followed by "The Week," *i.e.*, reflections on the seasons, the flowers, birds, or crops appropriate thereto. Then came "Romances of Real Life," stories of passion and crime re-told from *The Lounger's Commonplace-Book* and other sources, and "Birthdays of Eminent Men," brief and telling critical biographies of the "Immortal who never die." "We

must speak of them as they still exist among us, and not of their memories." The remaining paragraphs were occupied by extracts, with or without comment, from any ancient or modern work, lying open by chance on Hunt's desk as he wrote. Here appeared also, as supplements, those wonderful paragraphs of historical and literary gossip called "The Streets of London," which, after being continued in a later periodical, were finally incorporated in *The Town: Its Memorable Characters and Events*, 1848. The materials for this volume, in which the reader is "taken through London quarter by quarter, to notice the memorials as they arise," were gleaned from Pennant and *The Lounger's Commonplace-Book*, but it is instinct with the author's personality, and forms, with *The Old Court Suburb*, *Memorials of Kensington*, *Regal*, *Critical*, and *Anecdotal*, 1855, originally called *Lounging through Kensington*, and *A Saunter through the West End*, 1861, a fascinating historical guide-book to the Metropolis.

Indeed the greater part of *The London Journal* was reprinted in different forms, and much of Hunt's best work, included in the ordinary collections, was first published in this paper. After its failure he wrote reviews for *The Westminster* and *The Edinburgh* on the introduction of Macaulay, "Notes of a Lover of Books" and laureate verses for *The Monthly Chronicle*, essays on poetry and song in its relation to music for *The Musical World*, and edited from July, 1837, to March, 1838, *The Monthly Repository*, originally a magazine in the Unitarian interest, but made unsectarian by his editorial pre-

decessors, W. J. Fox and R. H. Horne. *The Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* also appeared in *Ainsworth's Magazine*, 1844, and some very thin *Table Talk*, printed in his volume of that name, over the signature "Adam Fitz-Adam, Esquire," in *The Atlas*, 1846.

Leigh Hunt's Journal : A Miscellany for the Cultivation of the Memorable, the Progressive, and the Beautiful, 1850, 1851, was the last of his own papers, the most frankly autobiographical and garrulous, by no means the least worthy.

"The object which I have most at heart in the new Journal is to help in assisting the right progress of the great changes coming in the world by the cultivation of a spirit of cheerfulness, reasonableness, and peace ; and the most special means which I look for to this end, and which I earnestly desire on all sides, from all parties and shades of party, or of no party at all, is the countenance and co-operation of men the most distinguished for genius and public spirit. I hope they will deign to consider the Journal as a kind of neutral ground or academic grove and resort of wit and philosophy in which, while they freely express their opinions, whatever these may be, they will do so in accordance with the particular spirit of the place, and whether or not they think it the best and most useful spirit to be evinced at other times. . . .

"But enough of enemies, for ever ; of friends, never. I confidently trust my undertaking in the hands of those, and of the public at large, feeling sure that they will not disapprove its spirit, whatever they may say to its power ; and hoping that the distinguished correspondents who commence with it, and other younger and to-be-distinguished ones whom I expect in their company, will save it from falling off, should my own strength be insufficient. I feel no abatement of it yet, thank God, as far as brain, or as heart and hope are concerned ; and success may give it me in respects less important. . . .

“ ‘Chi la leggerà, viva felice.’

“ May he, and she, that read it, live and prosper.”

Failure of accord with some of his contributors, and the small capital embarked by the proprietors, brought this darling Benjamin to a speedy end ; but it contained much excellent matter, both by the editor and his friends, being similar in tone and spirit to *The London Journal*, of which it was in some sort a revival.

Hunt now wrote for *The Musical Times*, *Household Words*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and closed his career as a journalist by sending sixteen chatty papers to *The Spectator* under a characteristic heading “The Occasional.” The last appeared on August 20, 1859, just a week before his death, and a memorial paper, by Edmund Ollier, the son of his old friend, concluded the series.

III.—POET.

LEIGH HUNT, at least in early days, found his greatest pleasure in the composition of verse, and fixed his ambitions upon becoming a fine poet. He never quite realised the hopelessness of the attempt, though his eagerness waned, and he could criticise his own work with even undue severity.

The earliest printed verses of which we have any record, entitled "Melancholy," appeared in *The European Magazine* for 1801, when the author was just sixteen; and he contributed in the same year to *The Juvenile Library*. But the boy was already a voluminous writer, and, in 1801 again, was published that "heap of imitations, all but absolutely worthless," to quote his own description — *Juvenilia; or, A Collection of Poems, written between the Ages of Twelve and Sixteen, by J. H. L. Hunt, late of the Grammar School of Christ's Hospital, and dedicated by Permission to the Hon. J. H. Leigh; containing Miscellanies, Translations, Sonnets, Pastorals, Elegies, Odes, Hymns, and Anthems.*

In his *Autobiography*, Leigh Hunt is very severe upon this ambitious production; but subsequent critics have found food for kindly comment within its pages. It was really a clever book for so young a writer, and shows a considerable acquaintance with many authors not generally beloved of schoolboys. Characteristics and senti-

ments appear in this early volume which remained with him through life. The pleasures of friendship, awarded a *first* place in his "An Earth upon Heaven" (*The Companion*, April 2, 1828), are here sung with unmeasured enthusiasm; a sincere affection for simple *English*, not to say suburban, scenery is clearly evinced; and, as already hinted, a loving familiarity with literature pervades the work. Moreover, his own tastes, fancies, and sentiments are expressed, with a strange combination of self-confidence and modesty, in facile and colloquial verse.

The abundant and, it need hardly be added, superfluous prefatory matter offers an amusing foretaste of Hunt's maturer charming egoism. The elegant *dedication* to his godfather betrays that respect of persons which enabled the man, who went to prison for denouncing the Prince Regent, to play the amateur poet-laureate during the last years of Southey's life, and to tolerate, if not to welcome, the patronage formerly associated with authorship from worthy persons demanding no sacrifice of *moral* independence. In the *advertisement*, "J. H. L. Hunt thinks it necessary to inform his readers, as they will undoubtedly perceive how much superior some of the following Poems are to others, that a few of the first pages, all the Translations but one, the two first Odes, and the first Hymn, were written at a very early age; that the Poem on 'Retirement,' the Pastorals, in imitation of Pope and Virgil, 'Elegy written in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey,' 'Ode to Truth,' the 'Progress of Painting,' 'Wandle's Wave,' the Hymns for the

Seasons, the 'Palace of Pleasure,' and the 'Funeral Anthem,' were the productions of his present age (sixteen); and the rest of his intermediate years." The elaborate imitation of Spenser, already a favourite, is introduced by some words "To the Public," containing an apologetic defence of "the simple style and obsolete diction," and concluding thus:—

"Where the allegory is wanting in the survey of human life, the youth and inexperience of the author will, it is hoped, be brought to the recollection of the excusing reader; and the moral, never to be too often repeated, that is drawn from it, which endeavours to correct the vices of the age by showing the frightful landscape that terminates the alluring path of sinful pleasure, supply the defects of a muse, who is entering into public in her sixteenth year, bashful on her first exhibition, and listening with trembling expectation, as she passes, to the shouts of disapprobation or applause that burst from the surrounding multitude."

This autobiographical naïvety, perfectly natural in so youthful an author, might surely have been restrained by judicious relatives; but there seems to have been a tradition in the Hunt family for several generations against any form of parental control, and the habit of establishing personal intimacies with his readers proved itself an integral part of Leigh Hunt's literary equipment.

The volume apparently satisfied the author's immediate desire for verse publication, and the ensuing products of his muse were either sent to the *Poetical Register*, or merely shown to his friends. The cares of making love and finding a profession fully occupied his time. His

next literary efforts were in critical prose, but when *The Examiner* was brought out in 1808, its pages were naturally open to the editor's verse. It was not, however, until he had more or less established this paper and started a quarterly magazine that his next poem of any length or importance was published. This was *The Feast of the Poets* (*The Reflector*, No. 4, 1812), a *jeu d'esprit* suggested by Sir John Suckling's *Session of the Poets*, and exhibiting a critical assumption and intolerance entirely at variance with his later catholic appreciations. Wordsworth, Scott, and Coleridge, for instance, fall under the lash of the satirist, and, as he afterwards pointed out in the *Autobiography*, the poem was well calculated to offend almost every class of political or literary thinkers. It is a very youthful, very impertinent, but fairly vigorous production, which at least excites more amusement than the revised version, afterwards printed in his *Poetical Works*.

This was followed by *The Descent of Liberty*, 1815, a masque on the downfall of Napoleon, written in prison, and designed as "a compliment to the allies, which they deserved well enough, inasmuch as it was a failure; otherwise they did not deserve it at all, for it was founded on a belief in promises which they never kept." The masque contains some of the best lyrics Hunt ever wrote, and a charming essay on the "Origin and Nature of Masques," most characteristically summarised:—

"In a word, as the present piece was written partly to indulge the imagination of one who could realise no sights for himself, so it

is more distinctly addressed to such habitual readers of poetry as can yield him a ready mirror in the liveliness of their own apprehensions. There is a good deal of prose intermixed, but the nature of a masque requires it, and if the reader be of the description just mentioned, and shall settle himself with his book in a comfortable arm-chair condition,—in winter, perhaps with the lights at his shoulder, and his feet on a good fender,—in summer, with a window open to a smoothing air, and the consciousness of some green trees about him,—and in both instances (if he can muster up so much poetical accompaniment) with a lady beside him,—the author does not despair of converting him into a very sufficient and satisfied kind of theatre.”

Such were the conditions under which Leigh Hunt loved to pore over the writings of others, and hoped that they might enjoy his own.

In the following year appeared *The Story of Rimini*, which led a reform in English poetry, and remains, in spite of patent defects, the most solid monument of Hunt's poetical achievements. There is a passage in the *Autobiography* that accounts for the form in which it was written, and estimates, not unwisely, its merits and defects :—

“Dryden, at that time, in spite of my sense of Milton's superiority, and my early love of Spenser, was the most delightful name to me in English literature. I had found in him more vigour, and music too, than in Pope, who had been my closest poetical acquaintance, and I could not rest till I had played upon his instrument. I brought, however, to my task a sympathy with the tender and the pathetic which I did not find in my master, and there was also an impulsive difference now and then in the style, and a greater tendency to simplicity of words. My versification was not so vigorous as his. There were many weak lines in it. It

succeeded best in catching the variety of his cadences ; at least, so far as they broke up the monotony of Pope. But I had a greater love for the beauties of external nature ; I think also I partook of a more southern insight into the beauties of colour, of which I made abundant use in the procession which is described in the first canto ;¹ and if I invested my story with too many circumstances of description, especially on points not essential to its progress, and thus took leave *in toto* of the brevity, as well as the force of Dante, still the enjoyment which led me into the superfluity was manifest, and so far became its warrant."

The Story of Rimini, then, was a protest against the polished couplet of Pope—a call to revive the freer manner of Dryden—a protest and a call expressed already to some extent in *The Lyrical Ballads*, but, through Hunt's influence, guiding the pens of Keats, Shelley, and some of their noblest successors. The poem to which we indirectly owe so much was itself a failure. In the first place, as Hunt himself points out, the whole conception was an act of bad taste—"to enlarge upon a subject which had been treated with exquisite sufficiency, and to his immortal renown, by a great master"—and the passions with which it deals are not naturally introduced or vigorously depicted. The digressions and descriptions, indeed, are the only parts of the poem which can be read with pleasure. They contain that *evidence of his own enjoyment* which Leigh Hunt, as we see from the above quotation, regarded as a warrant for their existence, and which does, in fact, form one of the principal charms of his work in poetry and prose.

¹ Perhaps the most really poetical passage in the book.

The Story of Rimini elicited many expressions of enthusiasm from those who afterwards profited by its influence and from others of Hunt's own circle; but it was met by his political enemies with a storm of virulent and personal abuse almost unparalleled in the history of journalism. It was treated by *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* as an indecent manifesto of the so-called Cockney school in whose dishonour they were eager to triumph. The fact that the Cockney king had written a poem (although he was not responsible for the plot) about an intrigue between an Italian princess and her brother-in-law afforded them an opportunity—it cannot be called an excuse—for perpetually whispering insinuations against his own private moral character, and implying that all his friends were equally disreputable.

Leigh Hunt himself found a moral lesson in the story, that deceit is vicious and impolitic. He throws the blame of Francesca's sin on her father, who, in order to force her marriage, directed the surly Giovanni to woo her by deputy in the person of his brother Paolo, and told her that she should find the former as charming as the latter was universally admitted to be. The defence is not very effectively conducted, perhaps. The mere attempt may serve to illustrate the kind of attitude always adopted by Leigh Hunt on similar questions, unconventional but *not* lax.

The versification was also abused, and here Hunt's principles were far superior to his practice. He never realised the proper dignity of poetry, and in discarding monotony, became slipshod. Hard polish was replaced

by limp jerkiness, and the couplet in his hands grew pert and garrulous. There are beautiful passages in the poem worthy of the great reform to be inaugurated, but they are few and far between. In the matter of language, again, he could not *maintain* a high standard. His very simplicity was in part artificial, and he had a singular taste for giving ordinary words an original significance which ruined his phrases, though it never made him obscure. The poem was considerably revised, but the changes relate principally to the final development of the plot, and are not all improvements.

In old age Leigh Hunt referred to *Rimini* as the work of a "tyro," but it does not contain any signs of youth from which he was afterwards exempt, and reaches as high a level as any of his longer pieces. It proves conclusively that he was not, in the highest sense, a poet.

In *Foliage*, 1818, we may notice the delicately fanciful sub-titles—"Greenwoods" and "Evergreens," for the original poems and the translations from poets of antiquity. It contained, moreover, the epistles to his friends, Byron, Moore, Hazlitt, Baron Field, and Charles Lamb, which are written with a good deal of careless spirit; the popular verses to T. L. H. and to J. H., and some of his best sonnets—particularly those *To the Grasshopper and the Cricket* (his own favourites),¹ and that on *The Nile*, excelling, as is generally admitted, the sonnets on the same subject by Shelley and Keats, with which it was written in friendly competition in February 1818:—

¹ See *Correspondence*, ii. 56.

“ It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,
And times and things, as in that vision, seem
Keeping along it their eternal stands,—
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands
That roamed through the young world, the glory extreme
Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,
The laughing queen that caught the world’s great hands.

“ Then came a mightier silence, stern and strong,
As of a world left empty of its throng,
And the void weighs on us ; and then we wake,
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along
’Twixt villages, and think how we shall take
Our own calm journey on for human sake.”

These are probably the strongest verses Hunt ever wrote, and, as Professor Saintsbury points out, “the eighth line is a re-discovery of a cadence which had been lost for centuries, and which has been constantly borrowed and imitated since.”

In the following year, 1819, appeared *Hero and Leander, and Bacchus and Ariadne*, a volume that deserves to be rescued from oblivion on account of the third poem it contained, not mentioned on the title-page, called *The Panther*, which has been rightly included in every volume of selections from Hunt with which I am acquainted. It is one of the short narrative pieces in which he handled some old fable or episode suggested by his reading, with a firm and delicate touch that he seldom reached in other styles.

“About this time,” says the *Autobiography*, “I trans-

lated the *Aminta of Tasso*, a poem (be it said with the leave of so great a name) hardly worth the trouble, though the prologue is a charming presentment of love in masquerade, and the *Ode on the Golden Age* a sigh out of the honestest part of the heart of humanity." Hunt's translation of the *Ode* is very delightful, and has been frequently reprinted by itself.

It was soon after the publication of this volume that he went to Italy, where he published no poetry of any importance except the heavy satire on Gifford—the one man he could never forgive—called *Ultra Crepidarius*, 1823, and *Bacchus in Tuscany* from Redi (1825), an exercise in dithyrambics which is by no means a success.

"I was the more incited to attempt a version of this poem, inasmuch as it was thought a choke-pear for translators. English readers asked me how I proposed to render the famous

‘Mostra aver poco giudizio’

(a line much quoted), and Italians asked what I meant to do with the ‘compound words’ (which are very scarce in their language). I laughed at the famous ‘mostra aver,’ which it required but a little animal spirits to ‘give as good as it brought’; and I had the pleasure of informing Italians that the English language abounded in compound words, and could make as many more as it pleased."

He published some verses in his *Literary Pocket-Book*, "or companion for the lover of art and nature" (1819-1822), over the signature *φ.*, and in *The Liberal* (1822-1823), among which were "The Lines to a Spider" and "Mahmound;" while *The Companion*, *The Chat of the*

Week, and *The Tatler*, all contained occasional poems by their editor.

In 1819 several volumes of Hunt's had been bound together and published under the title of his *Poetical Works*, but the first genuine collection appeared in 1832, published by subscription. The volume opens with a "good gossiping preface" of 58 pages, designed, as he frankly tells us, to bring it to a size "becoming" its price, a method which he maintains, with some show of justice, to be more honest than that of adding poems formerly rejected on their own merits. His self-selection is fairly judicious, though it is disappointing to learn that he only admitted the "Sonnet on the Nile" at the inducement of a partial friend. He has sufficient critical instinct to see that his best work will be in "a mixed kind of narrative poetry, part lively and part serious, somewhere between the longer poems of the Italians and the *Fabliaux* of the old French." He would fain pass his days in writing "eternal new stories in verse, of no great length, but just sufficient to vent the pleasure with which he is stung in meeting with some touching adventure, and which haunts him till he can speak of it somehow."

His theories on poetry are more fully expressed elsewhere,¹ but he here declares that "laws in poetry are nothing but the conclusions which critics have come to, respecting the means adopted by the best poets, for giving the greatest amount of pleasure." The sound critic was, however, an extreme sentimentalist, as this

¹ In the Preface to *Imagination and Fancy* most formally, quoted below, p. 110.

Preface bears witness by the pleasure expressed in "the very flowers on the tea-cups, and the grace with which a ball of cotton is rolled up"; and the argument for the use of triplets:—"I confess I like the very bracket that marks out the triplet to the reader's eye, and prepares him for the music of it. It has a look like the bridge of a lute."

The volume contained nothing new but "The Gentle Armour," a tame version of an old French romance, and most of its contents were included in later collections.

During 1834 appeared the brilliant lines on *Paganini*, one of his few compositions in blank verse (*The London Journal*, April 16), and *About Ben Adhem*, the finest of his narrative pieces (S. C. Hall's *Amulet*). *Captain Sword and Captain Pen* was published in 1835. Leigh Hunt treats of this poem at some length in the *Autobiography*, and relates how strongly its terrible pictures of the battlefield affected his imagination. But he was never at home in the realms of strong passion, and it is to be regretted that he should have thus exerted himself upon what seemed to him, as a lover of peace, an act of duty.

"The Blue-Stocking Revels, or Feast of the Violets," a kind of feminine *Feast of the Poets*, which appeared in *The Monthly Repository*, 1837, must be condemned for faults of which its author was seldom guilty. Leigh Hunt was so essentially "gallant," in the highest sense of that noble and much-abused term, that it is painful to accuse him of discourtesy towards women; but there is, unfortunately, no denying that in some of his early criti-

cisms upon actresses, in this satire, and in a few other passages, he was—without the slightest failure in good intention—both vulgar and pert. It can only be pleaded in extenuation that these occasional lapses arose from the non-essential or outside characteristics of his nature. He always promoted, to the best of his abilities, a genuine social and intellectual equality between the sexes; and in women of the highest culture, such as Mrs. Browning and Mrs. Shelley, he inspired a special sentiment of love and reverence.

Carlyle and his wife both exercised the privileges of the candid friend towards Leigh Hunt, but the former noticed more than once his chivalrous bearing towards Mrs. Carlyle—the heroine of his entirely exquisite and most popular *rondeau*, which appeared in *The Monthly Chronicle*, 1838 :—

“ Jenny kissed me, when we met,
 Jumping from the chair she sat in ;
Time, you thief, who love to get
 Sweets into your list, put that in :
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
 Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add—
 Jenny kissed me.”

This poem, which of course is *not* a *rondeau*, though Hunt—for some inexplicable reason—always so called it, was inspired by an impulsive embrace from Mrs. Carlyle, the expression of gratitude for his sonnet, “On a Lock of Milton's Hair” :—

“ It lies before me there, and my own breath
Stirs its thin outer threads, as though beside
The living head I stood in honoured pride,
Talking of lovely things that conquer death.
Perhaps he pressed it once, or underneath
Ran his fine fingers, when he leant, blank-eyed,
And saw in fancy Adam and his bride
With their rich locks, or his own Delphic wreath.

“ There seems a love in hair, though it be dead.
It is the gentlest, yet the strongest, thread
Of our frail plant,—a blossom from the tree
Surviving the proud trunk ; as if it said,
Patience and Gentleness is Power. In me
Behold affectionate Eternity.”

Two years later, in 1840, appeared his first and principal play, *The Legend of Florence*, written many years before, “in six weeks, in a state of delightful absorption, notwithstanding the nature of the story, and the cares that beset him.” By his familiarity with the theatre, and his varied literary talents, he was enabled to produce a graceful and pleasing poem, but it lacked the essentially dramatic qualities, and contained no strongly-drawn characters. It was performed, however, with some success, and he wrote a few other dramas, of which only one, *The Lover's Amazements*, was ever published or acted. In spite of his excellent theatrical criticisms, and “a strong propensity to dramatic writing,” Leigh Hunt was but a poor play-wright.

In 1841, he contributed three tales to *The Poems of Chaucer Modernised*,¹ and thereby bore witness to the

¹ He published a fourth in *Fraser's Magazine*, Feb., 1857.

crusade in honour of Chaucer, on which he had been engaged during the greater part of his life. His *Journals* are full of references to the father of English poetry, and he always maintained the thesis, now generally acknowledged, that Chaucer's verse was smooth and musical, if correctly pronounced. *The Monthly Magazine* for 1842 contained the characteristic "Rustic Walk and Dinner," never reprinted; and that somewhat dreary "poemettikin," "The Palfrey," came out in the same year.

He had soon the pleasure of arranging with Moxon for a pocket edition of his *Poetical Works*, which was published in 1844. "It is truly delightful to me, I confess," he writes to De Wilde, "to think that I am going at last, with the prestige of a cheap and popular verse as well as prose writer, headlong into the pockets of the community. You know in what sense, and in what sense alone, I am speaking of these recipients, of whatever importance to me may be the half-crowns which I shall replace." And again, "At all events, the book, as you say, will be a book wearable and worn-outable in the pocket, and God send it may be reduced there to shreds, in happy and relishing sympathy with crumbs of biscuits." It contained the greater part of his best work, and was reprinted, 1846, 1888.

After the appearance of this volume he seems to have written little poetry, though the "Fancy Concert," which appeared in *Ainsworth's Magazine* in 1845, is worthy of mention. His *Poetical Works* were reprinted in America, with an Introduction by his friend S. Adams Lee,¹ and

¹ 1857 and 1866, the only edition containing both his plays.

finally collected, revised by himself, and edited by his son Thornton, for Messrs. Routledge, Warne, & Routledge. This volume appeared in 1860, about a year after his death, but it is by no means a complete edition. It includes the whole of the 1844 edition, except *The Legend of Florence*; but in every other volume of Leigh Hunt's poetry it would be possible to find verses, many of them on a level with his best work, which would be new to readers of the 1860 collection. Perhaps the most striking omissions are *Abraham and the Fire Worshipers*; *The Fancy Concert*; the sonnets, *The Poets*, and *Ariosto's* (or *The Lover's*) *Prison*; such dainty lyrics as *The Nun*, and the *Dirge for an Infant*; Catullus' *Atys the Enthusiast*; *Roses*, and *Sprightly Old Age* from Anacreon, and other translations. At the same time we need not hesitate to judge of Leigh Hunt's poetical powers from this volume, in which he certainly designed to perpetuate his best work.

His strength lies, as he himself suspected, in the brief narrative poems of which *Abou Ben Adhem* is the highest example. Here the impulse is from without, the lines are prompted by the enjoyment of a "tale that is told," and by the desire to express and impart that pleasure. The critical powers guide the creative, and lend them a vigour not their own. His manner at such times is simple and lucid, playful or tender according to circumstances, but always sincere and glowing. His ear, so keen for judgment, directs the rhythm, and makes the verse flowing and easy. His many admirable translations are composed in the same spirit. A loyal enthu-

siasm for the originals prompts him to a rare fidelity in language and style, often achieved with marked success.

Could Hunt have *maintained* these qualities of taste and self-control for any considerable period, he might have taken high rank as a poet. But, in spite of evidence concerning the labour he actually expended on the polishing process, we cannot refute the charge of carelessness against almost everything he wrote. Whether from the blindness of partiality, or the incapacity of sustained concentration, he permitted flaws in his own work which he would have been the first to detect in that of others. Thus it is that in any longer pieces he is certain to offend the critical reader, and weaken his own claims to consideration.

The qualities of grace, delicate fancy, and tender sentiment have enabled him, however, to produce some more strictly original poems of undoubted merit, in the lyrical form; while the limitations of the sonnet have sometimes checked his animal vivacity and lent an unwonted firmness of touch to the expression of thoughts, themselves worthy of a poetical dress.

He lacks passion, dignity, and restraint, his imagination is almost entirely fanciful; but by the winning charm of his own fresh and cultured personality he attracts and even occasionally subdues. Part of the secret may be told in his own words. After relating the nervous excitement caused by serious composition, he proceeds:—

“The reader may be surprised to hear, after these

remarks, that what I write with the greatest composure is verses. He may smile, and say that he does not wonder, since the more art the less nature, the more artificiality the less earnestness. But it is not that ; it is that I write verses only when I most like to write ; that I write them slowly, with loving recurrence, and that the musical form is a perpetual solace and refreshment. The earnestness is not less. In one respect it is greater, for it is more concentrated. It is forced, by a sweet necessity, to say more things in less compass. But the necessity is sweet. The mode, and the sense of being able to meet its requirements, in however comparative a degree, are more than a sustainment : they are a charm. *This is the reason why poetry, not of the highest order, is sometimes found so acceptable. The author feels so much happiness in his task, that he cannot but convey happiness to his reader."*

IV.—CRITIC.

LEIGH HUNT's directly critical work is almost entirely confined to prefaces, the earliest of which appeared in *Classic Tales, Serious and Lively, a Selection from English and Foreign Authors, with Critical Essays on the Merits and Reputations of the Authors*, 1806 and 1807. Several volumes of this collection have been lately reprinted, but they are more in demand for the text than for the criticism. The introduction to the rare first edition of Shelley's *Masque of Anarchy* is more notable. It is a spirited, though slightly discursive defence of the man he loved and honoured beyond all others. *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar*, 1840, is remembered chiefly for the prefatory contributions of Lamb and Hazlitt, and the brilliant essay by Macaulay of which it was the occasion: The "Biographical and Critical Sketch" prefixed to an edition of *Sheridan's Works* in the same year is comparatively unimportant, though it does not arouse the sense of regret with which we approach the *Stories from the Italian Poets*, 1846. The text of this volume is delightful, but the introduction is disfigured by a foolish abuse of Dante which it is rather difficult to forgive. Hunt recognised Dante's greatness without really feeling it, and hated him for the cold spirit of revenge which he exhibited.

Beaumont and Fletcher, or the Finest Scenes, Lyrics, and other Beauties of these Two Poets, now First Selected from the Whole of their Works, to the Exclusion of Whatever is Morally Objectionable, 1855, is described in the prefatory "Remarks" as a volume—

"Where, in a word, is all the best passion and poetry of the two friends, such as I hope and believe they would have been glad to see brought together ; such as would have reminded them of those happiest evenings which they spent in the same room, not, perhaps, when they had most wine in their heads, and were loudest, and merriest, and least pleased, but when they were most pleased both with themselves and with all things, serene, sequestered, feeling their companionship and their poetry sufficient for them, without needing the satisfaction of its fame, or echo ; such evenings as those in which they wrote the description of the boy by the fountain's side, or his confession as Euphrasia, or Caratach's surrender to the Romans, or the address to sleep in Valentinian, or the divine song on 'Melancholy,' which must have made them feel as if they had created a solitude of their own, and heard the whisper of it stealing by their window."

Rather more than twenty years earlier he had written in *The Liberal* ("Book of Beginnings") on the same subject :—

"What divine plays would not Beaumont and Fletcher have left us, if they had not been fine gentlemen about town, and ambitions to please a perishing generation ! Their muse is like an accomplished country beauty, of the most exquisite kind, seduced up to town, and made familiar with the most devilish parts of it, yet retaining, through all her debauchery, a sweet regret and an adoring fondness for nature. She has lilies about her paint and patch-boxes, and loves them almost as much as when she was a child."

There is nothing peculiarly noteworthy in the prefatory essay to the *Book of the Sonnet*, 1867.

Leigh Hunt meditated the production of an anthology of English poetry, to which his peculiar qualities would have given an unique value. In the preface to his *Imagination and Fancy*, we read :—"The editor proposes to give in succession corresponding volumes of the poetry of action and passion (narrative and dramatic) from Chaucer to Campbell—of contemplation, from Surrey to Campbell—of wit and humour, from Chaucer to Byron—of song or lyrical poetry, from Chaucer again to Campbell, and Burns and O'Keefe." The volume on *Wit and Humour* alone appeared, though the characteristically named *Book for a Corner* informally covered some of the ground.

From his *Table-Talk* we hear of another fascinating but unrealised conception :—

"Cast your eye down any list of English writers, such, for instance, as that at the end of Mr. Craik's *History of our Literature*, and almost the only names that strike you as belonging to personally cheerful men are Beaumont and Fletcher, Suckling, Fielding, Farquhar, Steele, O'Keefe, Andrew Marvell, and Sterne. That Shakespeare was cheerful I have no doubt, for he was almost everything ; but still it is not his predominant characteristic, which is thought. Sheridan could 'set the table in a roar,' but it was a flustered one, at somebody's expense. His wit wanted good-nature. Prior had a smart air, like his cap. But he was a rake who became cynical. He wrote a poem in the character of Solomon on the vanity of all things. Few writers make you laugh more than Peter Pindar ; but there was a spice of the blackguard in him. You could not be sure of his truth or his good-will. . . .

"There should be a joyous set of elegant extracts—a Literatura Hilaris or Gaudens—in a score of volumes that we could have at hand, like a cellaret of good wine, against April or November weather. Fielding should be the port, and Farquhar the champagne, and Sterne the Malmsey; and whenever the possessor cast an eye on his stock, he should know that he had a choice draught for himself after a disappointment, or for a friend after dinner—some cordial extract of Parson Adams, or Plume, or Uncle Toby, generous as heart could desire, and as wholesome for it as laughter for the lungs."

The opening volume of the projected series appropriately contained an essay on the theory of the subject, Hunt's most deliberate confession of faith—"An Answer to the Question, 'What is Poetry?'"

"Poetry, strictly and artistically so-called, that is to say, considered not merely as poetic feeling, which is more or less shared by the world, but as the operation of that feeling, such as we see it in the poet's book, is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity. Its means are whatever the universe contains, and its ends pleasure and exaltation. Poetry stands between nature and convention, keeping alive among us the enjoyment of the external and the spiritual world; it has constituted the most enduring fame of nations; and, next to love and beauty, which are its parents, is the greatest proof to man of the pleasure to be found in all things, and of the probable riches of infinitude. . . . Poetry is imaginative passion. The quickest and subtlest test of the possession of its

essence is in expression; the variety of things to be expressed shows the amount of its resources: and the continuity of the song completes the evidence of its strength and greatness. He who has thought, feeling, expression, imagination, action, character, and continuity, all in the largest amount and highest degree, is the greatest poet. . . .

“Imagination, teeming with action and character, makes the greatest poets; feeling and thought, the next; fancy (by itself), the next; wit, the last. Thought by itself makes no poet at all; for the mere conclusions of the understanding can at best be only so many intellectual matters of fact. Feeling, even destitute of conscious thought, stands a far better poetical chance; feeling being a sort of thought without the process of thinking, a grasper of the truth without seeing it. And what is very remarkable, feeling seldom makes the blunders that thought does. An idle distinction has been made between taste and judgment. Taste is the very maker of judgment. Put an artificial fruit in your mouth, or only handle it, and you will soon perceive the difference between judging from taste or tact, and judging from the abstract figment called judgment. The latter does but throw you into guesses and doubts. . . . Luckily, delightfulness is not incompatible with greatness, willing soever as men may be in their present imperfect state to set the power to subjugate above the power to please. Truth, of any great kind whatsoever, makes great writing. . . . What the poet has to cultivate above all things, is love and truth; what he has to avoid, like poison, is the

fleeting and the false. He will get no good by proposing to be 'in earnest at the moment.' His earnestness must be innate and habitual ; born with him, and felt to be his most, precious inheritance. . . . No man recognises the worth of utility more than the poet ; he only desires that the meaning of the term may not come short of its greatness, and exclude the noblest necessities of his fellow-creatures. He is quite as much pleased, for instance, with the facilities for rapid conveyance afforded him by the railroad, as the dullest confiner of its advantages to that single idea, or as the greatest two-idea'd man, who varies that single idea with hugging himself on his 'buttons,' or his good dinner. But he sees also the beauty of the country through which he passes, of the towns, of the heavens, of the steam-engine itself, thundering and fuming along like a magic horse, of the affections that are carrying, perhaps, half the passengers on their journey, nay, of those of the great two-idea'd man ; and, beyond all this, he discerns the incalculable amount of good, and knowledge, and refinement, and mutual consideration, which this wonderful invention is fitted to circulate over the globe, perhaps to the displacement of war itself, and certainly to the diffusion of millions of enjoyments."

There is no occasion to expatiate upon the value or the limitations of this conception ; it speaks for itself, and entirely prepares us for the method of criticism always adopted by Leigh Hunt—the *expression of his own enjoyment*. Accepting Wordsworth's dictum that the chief business of the poet is to give pleasure, he might

have added that the chief business of the critic is to give thanks for the pleasure thus bestowed. He dwelt always on particular passages, *not* on general theories, and it is interesting to note that Matthew Arnold, starting from the very different conception of poetry as a "criticism of life," recommends and practises a similar course:—

"Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples; to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*. They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic."¹

Leigh Hunt, however, carried the fashion of sign-post criticism to an extreme, and committed the abomination of italicising favourite passages. Many of his essays are practically reproductions from some volume in his possession with his own underlinings and marginal notes transcribed. Mrs. Fields has shown us, in her gossiping *Shelf of Old Books*, how he marked and scored his "poets," without even waiting to mend his pen; and it is certain that such conduct in a personal friend or contemporary would be as unpardonable as Wordsworth's habit of cutting other people's books with a buttery knife. But while the lapse of time can never redeem Wordsworth's iniquity, it has already justified Leigh Hunt's. Scribbling over books is allowable or, at least, it *was* allowable, to men whose critical opinions are worthy of respect; and the volume so disfigured gains a value not

¹ General preface to Mr. Humphrey Ward's *English Poets*.

its own. These, at any rate, were Leigh Hunt's methods, and it is undeniable that by the publication of these labelled extracts he created, encouraged, or revived, as the case might be, with different readers or different authors, a taste for nearly everything most truly beautiful in English poetry. "He delighted to consider himself a taster in literature, the *Indicator*, or honey-hunter¹ among the flowers of the past," and his judgment was remarkably sure and sane. Among his contemporaries, Lamb was undeniably more subtle, Coleridge more profound, and Hazlitt more brilliant; but none of them shared his breadth of sympathy and catholic open-mindedness. In his younger days, when poetry was not, he turned men's minds to Chaucer and Spenser; and at the dawn of a new era, bid them sit at the feet of Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and Browning. Professor Saintsbury,

¹ Over each number of the original *Indicator* was printed this little paragraph of Natural History:—"There is a bird in the interior of Africa, whose habits would rather seem to belong to the interior of Fairy-land; but they have been well authenticated. It indicates to honey-hunters where the nests of wild-bees are to be found. It calls them with a cheerful cry, which they answer; and on finding itself recognised, flies and hovers over a hollow tree containing the honey. While they are occupied in collecting it, the bird goes to a little distance, where he observes all that passes; and the hunters, when they have helped themselves, take care to leave him his portion of the food. This is the *Cuculus Indicator* of Linnæus, otherwise called the *Moroc*, *Bee Cuckoo*, or *Honey-Bird*."

"There he arriving round about doth flie,
And takes survey with busie, curious eye,
Now this, now that, he tasteth tenderly."—SPENSER.

the most severe of Hunt's modern critics, says that, "he jumped at good things when he came near them almost as involuntarily as the needle to the magnet," and the simile may be accepted without qualification.

His limitations were those of a sentimentalist, and resulted chiefly from an inability to enter into certain moods; the tragic and the sublime never appealed to him so completely as the gay and the graceful; sustained thought was less congenial than tender fancy. He worked in detail, and occasionally, by losing the sense of proportion, missed a central motive or total effect.

Always loving verse above prose, he wrote more frequently on the former, and judged it better; but all his work is enriched by the critical results of his wide and thoughtful reading. Appreciations arise incidentally on every page, often most happily compressed into a single sentence. For example, in *Rabelais*, "hunger and thirst personified sate down to a feast of revelry, with wit for their host." The literary career of Sir Egerton Brydges "is like some long evening sigh over a barren moor, or through the ruins of an old castle." O'Keefe's "muse was as fresh as a dairymaid." The essays of Elia "will take their place among the daintiest productions of English wit-melancholy." "Luxuriant, remote Spenser, immortal child in poetry's most poetical solitudes." "Parson Adams should have been Shakespeare's chaplain, and played at bowls with him."

V.—MISCELLANIST.

THE greater number of Leigh Hunt's essays appeared originally in periodicals, and are therefore more naturally grouped under subjects than chronologically. A few collections, mostly reprints, may, however, be briefly noticed.

Passing over the rather intolerant "Attempt to show the Folly and Danger of Methodism," reprinted from *The Examiner* in 1809, and other volumes on special subjects to be noticed elsewhere, we come first to his own admirable selection from *The Indicator* and *The Companion*, 1834, by which alone his reputation might be safely left to stand or fall. This was afterwards published with *The Seer*, which had been chosen from other periodicals, *The London Journal*, *The Liberal*, *The Tatler*, etc., with the motto, "Love adds a precious seeing to the eye," and had first appeared in 1841. *Men, Women and Books*, 1847, is a similar collection, but, though the most accessible, and therefore the best known, is unfortunately not a good example of Hunt's powers. *The Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*, 1848, contains some suggestive papers on pastoral poets; while in *Table Talk*, 1851, we have the counter-sweepings of a voluminous journalist. Many collections, of varying interest and importance, have appeared since Hunt's death. He himself also

reprinted three respectable compilations, that might well have been contributed to the pages of *Tit Bits*; namely, *One Hundred Romances of Real Life*, 1843, and the two series of *Readings for Railways*, 1850 and 1853, in the second of which he was assisted by J. B. Syme.

Hunt will be best appreciated, however, by a study of the original *Indicator*, 1821, *Companion*, 1828, and *London Journal*, 1834-5, which include the more important contents of the above volumes, and many charming papers never reprinted. His deservedly most popular work is "purely miscellaneous, depending for its subject and treatment on the suggestion of the moment: as he said in 'The Wishing Cap,' 'I will take up in this paper any subject to which I feel an impulse.' And the subjects are often commonplace enough, but 'he brings poetry to our breakfast-table, and strikes light out of the pebble at our feet,' finding—

'Sermons in stones, and good in everything.'

These casual writings, however, according to the testimony of those who knew him best, "were the result of very considerable labour and painstaking, of the most conscientious investigation of facts, where facts were needed; and of a complete devotion of his faculties towards the objects to be accomplished." At one time admirable examples of the colloquial style, at another they are shockingly constructed and even ungrammatical.

They take up a position in the history of literature

somewhere between the *Tatlers* and *Spectators* of Steele and the magazines of the present day. Leigh Hunt studied, and in his early days copied, the direct imitators of Steele and his contemporaries — *The Observer*, *The Connoisseur*, *The Lounger*, etc.; but he seems to have been himself largely responsible for the combination of æsthetic and contemplative writing with matters of immediate or political interest with which we are so familiar. He helped to introduce magazine methods into the newspapers without destroying their sensationalism, as we are now trying to introduce newspaper methods into the magazines without discrediting their prestige. He shared of course the didactic philanthropic enthusiasms of his day, and appealed designedly to a humbler class of readers than his masters. Addison and Steele wrote for "The Town," "The Wit," and "The Dandy," only occasionally condescending to the worthy citizen. Leigh Hunt is frankly bourgeois; he addresses himself "to those who have not had the advantages of a classical education." He chose Hampstead for his Paradise, and among the vineyards of Italy "pitched himself in imagination into the thick of Covent Garden." These elements of the true Cockney, in that they were sincere and nowise despicable, secured to him a certain measure of popularity among the habitual newspaper readers.

In prose, as in poetry, Leigh Hunt holds the peculiar position of a leader among giants taller than himself, a humble teacher of the mighty. His junior contemporaries, certainly recognising his influence, entered

the lists, and passed him easily. But the comparison need not always be kept in view, and, by looking through and beyond it, we may discover a personality independent, distinguishable, and not altogether unworthy. The unique sanity of his criticism has been noticed. In the miscellaneous essays now under consideration he adopted a manner that has since become indissolubly associated with the name of Elia; and he seems, at first sight, comparatively commonplace. But though his achievements are unquestionably of a lower order than Lamb's, they also differ from his by coming nearer to human nature, and possessing greater sincerity and earnestness. Much of Lamb's peculiar charm arises from a certain whimsical far-awayness and delicate romanticism that hardly touches our actual experience, while Leigh Hunt's sentiments and characters are literal transcripts, sifted and composed, but not touched up. This true realism gives them a place in our hearts which the powers of imagination alone cannot secure. They throw sunlight on the path of real life.

Though, in the strictest sense of the word, miscellaneous, Leigh Hunt's essays fall naturally into certain general divisions according to the subject treated, or, more accurately, according to the originally inspiring subject, for he never "keeps to the point."

We may first consider the semi-philosophic or contemplative, of which the best known is probably the beautiful *Deaths of Little Children*. The opening sentence strikes the key-note of the problem, how to face the greatest of all sorrows:—"A Grecian philosopher, being

asked why he wept for the death of his son, since the sorrow was in vain, replied, 'I weep on that very account.' And his answer became his wisdom." The thought suggests reminiscences of his mother's grave, praise of tears, and the pretty offer of consolation. "Those who have lost an infant are never, as it were, without an infant child. . . . This one alone is rendered an immortal child. Death has arrested it with his kindly harshness and blessed it into an eternal image of youth and innocence." In a manner equally informal, he expounds (*An Earth upon Heaven*) his views of a future state, pleading, with half-veiled seriousness, for an intermediate heaven of "these natural homes and resting-places, which are so heavenly to our imaginations, even though they be built of clay, and are situate in the fields of our infancy"; a few centuries of preparation for the state of *final* bliss, "where everything is marvellous and opposed to our experience":—

"In a word, we cannot but persuade ourselves, that to realise everything that we have justly desired on earth, will *be* heaven; we mean, for that period; and that afterwards, if we behave ourselves in a proper pre-angelical manner, we shall go to another heaven still better, where we shall realise all that we desired in our first."

This early Paradise, where "there can be no clergymen, as there are no official duties for them," shall contain a friend—"no shirker of his nectar,"—a mistress, "with one or two charming little angelical peccadilloes;" and *new books* by Shakespeare and Spenser, another *Decameron*, and forty more novels by Walter Scott.

“A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness.
Oh, wilderness were paradise enow.”¹

“The weather will be extremely fine, but not without such varieties as shall hinder it from being tiresome. April will dress the whole country in diamonds, and there will be enough cold in winter to make a fire pleasant of an evening. The fire will be made of sweet-smelling turf and sunbeams; but it will have a look of coal. If we choose, now and then, we shall even have inconveniences.”

He often touches upon kindred subjects with the same delicate appeal to natural emotions, preaching thus indirectly the undogmatic faith that inspired his *Religion of the Heart*. He betrays, moreover, an obstinate moral sense, not disposed to deny itself the pleasure of expression, but unexpectedly charitable to vices committed with good grace, if redeemed by a good heart.

In the famous character-sketches, Hunt is working in that borderland between history and fiction which may be described as class-biography. His methods are very different from those of the old “characters” of Butler or Overbury, in which we read, for example, of *A Lover*:—

“His heart is caught in a net with a pair of bright shining eyes, as larks are with pieces of a looking-glass. He makes heavy com-

¹ The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

plaints against it for deserting of him, and desires to have another in exchange for it ; which is a very unreasonable request, for if it betrayed its bosom-friend, what will it do to a stranger that should give it trust and entertainment? . . . All lovers are poets for the time being, and make their ladies a kind of mosaic work of several coloured stones joined together by a strong fancy, but very stiff and unnatural ; and though they steal stars from heaven, as Prometheus did fire, to animate them, all will not make them alive or alive-like."

Leigh Hunt's style is far more closely allied to that of modern fiction. He illustrates character by manners, without formally analysing it ; and makes the type life-like by a kind of borrowed individuality. *The Old Gentleman* is a pathetic figure "very clean and neat ; and, in warm weather, proud of opening his waistcoat half-way down, and letting so much of his frill be seen, in order to show his hardiness as well as taste." The gentle, unassuming creature must win the reader's heart ; from the morning, when he is "cheapening a new old print for his portfolio," or hearing of the newspapers, until the evening, when he plays cards or goes to the theatre, where, "during the splendid scenes, he is anxious that the little boy should see." "When he gets very old indeed, he will sit for whole evenings and say little or nothing ; but informs you that there is Mrs. Jones (the housekeeper), 'she'll talk.'" His counterpart, *The Old Lady*, "generally dresses in plain silks that make a gentle rustling as she moves about in the silence of her room ; and she wears a nice cap with a lace border that comes under the chin. . . . Her waist is rather tight and trim than otherwise, as she had a fine

one when young ; and she is not sorry if you see a pair of her stockings on a table that you may be aware of the neatness of her leg and foot." She thinks "the clergyman a nice man," remembers being complimented by Mr. Wilkes—"a sad, loose man, but engaging," and is passionately loyal.

These are the principal portraits in the gallery, but there are many others, drawn with equal care and the same tender and humorous insight. *The Maidservant*, who sighs over a good supper and reads *Pamela*, *The Waiter*, with a little money in the funds, whose nieces look up to him, and the delightful *Seamen on Shore*, drawn from actual persons, as we learn from the *Autobiography*, are among the best of these. From *The Conductor*, *Inside an Omnibus*, *On the Sight of Shops*, etc., etc., we may learn of an ever-recurring delight in the streets of London, as keen and more widely observant than Lamb's. *The Monthly Nurse*, "a middle-aged, motherly sort of gossiping, hushing, flattering, dictatorial, knowing, ignorant, not very delicate, comfortable, uneasy, slip-slop kind of blinking individual, between asleep and awake," is obviously a near relation to some of Dickens's characters ; and an unexpected likeness may be discovered between the *Maidservant* and Miss Martineau's *Maid of all Work*, readers of which supposed that the authoress must have experienced the life she was describing. Writing of a slightly later period, and with a motive wholly didactic, Miss Martineau employs the same proportions of generalisation and detail, the same balance between the type and the individual, and is

often led to a consideration of the same items. The picture is far less attractive or artistic, but it is more truthful by virtue of its high moral earnestness. Leigh Hunt maintains, with his wonted optimism, that in spite of indigestion and depression imitated from her young mistress, the "mop and the scrubbing-brush" keep the maidservant cheerful and healthy; whereas the object of Miss Martineau's paper is to prove that the labour usually demanded must ruin her health and shorten her life.

Hunt approaches still more closely the method of fiction in certain *Tales* (tastefully collected by Prof. Knight, 1891), which, like his narrative poems, are paraphrases of favourite episodes in ancient literature. They have been chosen, as a rule, for some touch of delicate and rare sentiment which is most happily reproduced in a simple and effective style. They indicate certain ideals of character in men and women, not altogether usual, but full of romantic chivalry and charm, most fully exemplified, perhaps, in *A Generous Woman* and the *Hamadryad*.—"The hand that could strike my bee with a lingering death, and prefer the embracing of the dice-box to that of affectionate beauty, is not worthy of love and the green trees."

The essays on animals, such as "The Cat by the Fire," "A Pigeon making Love," and the amusing papers on "The Zoological Gardens," are in a similar vein to the above; and in speaking of inanimate objects such as "Sticks," "Hats," and others even more remote from humanity, he adopts a personal point of view.

The paper on "Coaches," extending over two *Indicators*, is full of good things. After rejecting as "gouty and superfluous" the carriage "full of cushions and comfort ; elegantly coloured inside and out ; rich, yet neat ; light and rapid, yet substantial ;" and scouting the "ambition to have TANDEM written on his tombstone," he declares that "a postchaise involves the idea of travelling, which in the company of those we love is home in motion," and finally descends to a consideration of the hackney coach :—"One of the greatest helps to a sense of merit in other things is a consciousness of one's own wants. Do you despise a hackney coach ? Get tired ; get old ; get young again. Lay down your carriage, or make it less uneasily too easy. Have to stand up half an hour, out of a storm, under a gateway. Be ill, and wish to visit a friend who is worse. Fall in love, and want to sit next your mistress, or if all this will not do, fall in a cellar." Of the coaches themselves, "some look chucked under the chin, some nodding, some coming at you sideways." Their submissiveness is only surpassed by the "vital patience of the horses" :—

"Can anything better illustrate the poet's line about

'Years that bring the philosophic mind,'

than the still hung head, the dim indifferent eye, the dragged and blunt-cornered mouth, and the gaunt imbecility of body dropping its weight on three tired legs in order to give repose to the lame one ? When it has blinkers on, they seem to be shutting up its eyes for death, like the windows of a house. Fatigue and the habit of suffering have become as natural to the creature as the bit

to its mouth. Once in half an hour it moves the position of its leg, or shakes its drooping old ears. The whip makes it go, more from habit than from pain. Its coat has become almost callous to minor stings. The blind and staggering fly in autumn might come to die against its cheek.

“Of a pair of hackney-coach horses, one so much resembles the other that it seems unnecessary for them to compare notes. They have that within which is beyond the comparative. They no longer bend their heads towards each other as they go. They stand together as if unconscious of each other’s company, but they are not. An old horse misses his companion, like an old man. The presence of an associate, who has gone through pain and suffering with us, need not say anything. It is talk, and memory, and everything.”

There are also a number of charming papers on the different occupations of daily life. One of the most trying of minor virtues is *getting up on cold mornings*. The unwilling “are ‘haled’ out of their beds, says Milton, by ‘harpy-footed furies,’ fellows who come to call them.” The spirits may be revived, however, by *breakfast*¹ with flowers, “one of these green smiles upon the board,” and a book “standing among the cups, edgeways, plain-looking, perhaps poor and battered, perhaps bought of some dull huckster in a lane for a few pence.” Let us avoid, at this cheerful hour, “too much potted gout and twelve-shilling irritability.” “Boiling, proportion, and attention, are the three magic words of tea-making. . . . In tea, properly so-called, you should slightly taste the sugar, be sensible of a balmy softness in the milk, and enjoy at once a solidity, a delicacy, a relish, and a fragrance in the tea.” By a natural associa-

¹ *London Journal*, July 2nd, 1834, seq.

tion our thoughts are turned to the Chinese :—"How the Chinese came to invent tea, as Sancho would say, we do not know ; but it is the most ingenious, humane, and poetical of their discoveries. It is their epic poem;"¹ and "the very word *tea*, so petty, so infantine, so winking-eyed, so expressive, somehow or other, of something inexpressibly minute, and satisfied with a little (*tee !*), resembles the idea one has (perhaps a very mistaken one) of that extraordinary people, of whom Europeans know little or nothing, except that they sell us this preparation, bow back again our ambassadors, have a language consisting only of a few hundred words, gave us *China* ware, and the strange pictures on our tea-cups, made a certain progress in civilisation long before we did, mysteriously stopped at it and would go no further, and if numbers, and the customs of 'venerable ancestors' are to carry the day, are at once the most populous and the most respectable nation on the face of the earth." Inevitably reminded of Dr. Johnson, the essayist touches on a host of allusions to tea-drinking in literature from Redi to D'Israeli, and compares a child over a milk-bowl to "everything that is young and innocent, the morning, the fields, the dairies" :—

"You may make a landscape, if you will, out of your breakfast table, better than Mr. Kirk's picture. Here where the bread stands is its father, the field of corn, glowing in the sun, cut by the tawny reapers, and presenting a path for lovers. The village church (where they are to be married) is on a leafy slope, on one side, and on the other is a woody hill, with fountains. There, far over the

¹ *The Indicator*—"Table Wits at Breakfast."

water (for this basin of water, with island lumps of butter in it, shall be the sea), are our friends the Chinese, picking the leaves of their tea-trees, a beautiful plant ; or the Arabs plucking the berries of the coffee-tree, a still more beautiful one, with a profusion of white blossoms and an odour like jasmine. For the sugar (instead of a bitterer thought, not so harmonious to our purpose, but not to be forgotten at due times) you may think of Waller's Sacharissa, so named from the Latin word for sugar (*saccharum*), a poor compliment to the lady; but the lady shall sweeten the sugar, instead of the sugar doing honour to the lady ; and she was a very knowing as well as beautiful woman, and saw farther into love and sweetness than the sophisticate court poet ; so she would not have him, notwithstanding his sugary verses, but married a higher nature."

In writing of natural objects, on which the Cockney poet has put forth some of his best work, Leigh Hunt dwells upon the same kind of cheerful detail, preaching by the mere expression of happiness, "the art of making the best of what is before us." He cannot appreciate, it must be admitted, the lofty grandeur and rugged majesty of Nature's highest moods ; but he loves the brook, the hedge, the lane, the undulation, the "little glow-worm lighting up her trusting lamp, to show her lover where she is:"—in a word, the suburb. He heralds "the union of the two best things in the world, the love of nature, and the love of each other." *The Months Descriptive of the Successive Beauties of the Year*, 1821, is a dainty calendar of popular natural history, but the papers on such congenial subjects as *Spring* and *May-Day*, are quite as significant. The *Stone*, "musician of the brook," is not overlooked, nor the *Daisy* with its "homely face,"—"Belle et douce marguerite, aimable

sœur du roi king-cup, we would tilt for thee with a hundred pens, against the stoutest poet that did not find perfection in thy cheek."

One who talks so much, and all his writings are colloquial, is naturally often reduced to be witty upon the weather, and thereby becomes occasionally tedious. We hear too much about the duty of cheerfulness, though it should be remembered in extenuation that the essays were written at different times, for different papers, alternating with others on very different subjects, and were never intended by their author to be considered *en masse*. He has published, indeed, through a lapse of memory, two papers on *A Rainy Day* (*Indicator*, June 21, 1820, and *London Journal*, Aug. 1, 1835), which are strangely dissimilar. In the former, after recounting the clever imitation of Tate Wilkinson, by Charles Matthews, afterwards incorporated in the *Autobiography*, and dilating upon the folly of not lighting a fire on a cold day because it is summer, he stoops to chuckle over the agonies of a fat leg in a white stocking splashed by the mud. In the latter he gives us a charming dialogue between "little fond heart and bright eyes," watching the rain, and almost tear-conquered by her longing for a party, and her "nice, kind mamma" who, instead of scolding, tries to make it up to her child by a treat at home, bidding her "make the best of a bad day by thinking of something superior to it." *Mists and Fogs, A Dusty Day, To One Whom Bad Weather Depresses, and Bad Weather*, are all directed towards the same object. In the course of the last he naïvely apologises for not being so pleasant as

he desired "because some friends of ours the other night were the pleasantest people in the world till five o'clock in the morning." In *Fine Days in January and February*, and the two famous papers entitled *Now*, he dwells, on the other hand, on the positive delights of good weather.

Leigh Hunt possesses both wit and humour in no ordinary degree, and he is an admirable critic of these qualities in others; yet nowhere has he failed so lamentably as in certain deliberate attempts at being funny. *A Letter to the Bells of a Parish Church in Italy*, *The True Enjoyment of Splendour*, and his version of Gresset's *Vert-Vert* are really amusing, but the sheer buffoonery of *Carfington Blundell, Esq.*, and of *Jack Abbot's Breakfast* is depressing in the extreme. The animal spirits, elsewhere so delightful, have run riot, and are veritably drunk with noisy laughter. The former essay, however, is partially redeemed by one excellent paragraph:—

"You know, observant reader, the way in which sheep carry themselves on abrupt and saltatory occasions; how they follow one another with a sort of spurious and involuntary energy; what a pretended air of determination they have; how they really have it, as far as example induces and fear propels them; with what a heavy kind of lightness they take the leap; how brittle in the legs, lumpish in the body, and insignificant in the face; how they seem to quiver with apprehension while they are bold in act; and with what a provoking and massy springiness they brush by you, if you happen to be in the way, as though they wouldn't avoid the terrors of your presence if possible, or rather as if they would avoid it with all their hearts, but insulted you out of a desperation of inability. *Baas* intermix their pensive objections with the hurry, and a sound of feet as

of water. Then, ever and anon, come the fiercer leaps, the conglomerating circuits, the dorsal visitations, the yelps and tongue lollings of the dog, lean and earnest minister of compulsion; and loud, and dominant over all, exult the no less yelping orders of the drover, indefinite, it is true, but expressive—rustical cogencies of *oo* and *ou*, the unintelligible jargon of the Corydon or Thrysis of Chalk-Ditch, who cometh, final and humane, with a bit of candle in his hat, a spike at the end of his stick, and a hoarseness full of pastoral catarrh and juniper.”

It remains that Hunt's first and chief inspiration, in his miscellanies as elsewhere, was literature. His best essays, without considering those devoted to actual criticism, are still on books and their makers.

Such are *Social Genealogy*, in which he traces “a link of ‘beamy hands’ from our own times up to Shakespeare,” and recalls, with fond enthusiasm, many notable friendships between great writers; and *A Novel Party*, “in which the company consisted of those immortal, though familiar creatures, the heroes and heroines of the wonderful persons who have lived among us, called novelists. . . . The Camillas and Evelinas were extremely entertaining, and told us a number of stories that made us die with laughter. Their fault consisted in talking too much about lords and pawnbrokers. . . . We are afraid, from what we saw this evening, that poor Joseph is not as well as he would be with his sister Pamela. . . . It seems that Lovelace and Clarissa live in a neighbouring quarter, called Romance, a very grave place, where few of the company visited. . . . Lady Grandison was a regular beauty, but did not become a

cloak. She was best in full dress. Pamela was a little, soft-looking thing, who seemed as if butter would melt in her mouth ! But she had a something in the corner of her eye which told you that you had better take care how you behaved yourself."

There is a passage on Bookstalls which betrays, through all its playful delicacy, the writer's inherent carelessness about his own practical interests :—

"In some instances (for it is not the case with everyone) your second-hand bookseller condescends even to expect to be beaten down in the price he charges, petty as it is ; and accordingly is good enough to ask more than he will take, as though he did nothing but refine upon the pleasures of the purchaser. Not content with valuing knowledge and delight at a comparative nothing, he takes ingenious steps to make even that nothing less ; and under the guise of a petty struggle to the contrary (as if to give you an agreeable sense of your energies) seems dissatisfied unless he can send you away thrice blessed—blessed with the book, blessed with the cheapness of it, and blessed with the advantage you have had over him in making the cheapness cheaper. Truly we fear that out of a false shame we have too often defrauded our second-hand friend of the generous self-denial he is thus prepared to exercise in our favour, and by giving him the price set down in his catalogue, left him with impressions to our disadvantage."

Book-binding and *Indexes* are pleasant papers, showing indirectly that Leigh Hunt cared very little for any part of a book but its thoughts. He was not a bibliophile, as we understand the term, and probably never yearned after a "first edition." In *The World of Books* he maintains a thesis, undoubtedly true for himself, that we may really learn more of a country from books than by

actually visiting it:—"You see that young man there, turning down the corner of the dullest spot in Edinburgh, with a dead wall over against it, and delight in his eyes? He sees No. 4, the house where the girl lives he is in love with. Now, what that place is to him, all places are, in their proportion, to the lover of books, for he has beheld them by the light of imagination and sympathy."

None of the above, however, can be compared for variety of interest and sustained excellence to the deservedly popular *My Books*.—"I entrench myself in my books equally against sorrow and the weather. . . . When I speak of being in contact with my books, I mean it literally. I like to lean my head against them. . . . I turn my back upon the sea; I shut up even one of the side windows looking upon the mountains,¹ and retain no prospect but that of the trees. On the right and left of me are book-shelves; a bookcase is affectionately open in front of me; and thus kindly enclosed with my books and the green leaves, I write. . . . I like a great library next my study; but for the study itself, give me a small snug place, almost entirely walled with books. . . . The very perusal of the backs is a 'discipline of humanity.' . . . I have been a meek son in the family of book-losers. I may affirm upon a moderate calculation, that I have lent and lost in my time (and I am eight-and-thirty), half-a-dozen decent-sized libraries—I mean books enough to fill so many ordinary bookcases. . . . I own I borrow books with as much facility as I lend. . . . I yield to none in my love of bookstall urbanity. . . . Book-prints

¹ Written in Italy.

of all sorts, bad and good, take with me as much as when I was a child ; and I think some books, such as *Prior's Poems*, ought always to have portraits of the authors. . . . I love an author the more for having been himself a lover of books. The idea of an ancient library perplexes our sympathies by its map-like volumes, rolled upon cylinders. We cannot take kindly to a yard of wit, or to thirty inches of moral observation, rolled out like linen in a draper's shop. . . . The ancients had little of what we call learning. They made it. They were also no very eminent buyers of books. They made books for posterity."

The paper closes with a familiar gossip of all the most famous book-lovers, and the often-quoted aspiration :—

"In one small room, like the compressed spirits of Milton, can be gathered together

'The assembled souls of all that men held wise.'

May I hope to become the meanest of these existences? This is a question which every author, who is a lover of books, asks himself some time in his life, and which must be pardoned, because it cannot be helped. I know not. I cannot exclaim with the poet,

'Oh, that my name were number'd among theirs,
Then gladly would I end my mortal days.'

For my mortal days, few and feeble as the rest of them may be, are of consequence to others. *But I should like to remain visible in this shape.* The little of myself that pleases myself I could wish to be accounted worth pleasing others. I should like to survive so, were it only for the sake of those who love me in private, knowing

as I do what a treasure is the possession of a friend's mind, when he is no more. At all events, nothing while I live and think can deprive me of any value for such treasures. I can help the appreciation of them while I last, and love them till I die ; and perhaps, if fortune turns her face once in kindness upon me before I go, I may chance, some quiet day, to lay my over-beating temples on a book, and so have the death I most envy."

VI.—CONCLUSION.

IT had been Leigh Hunt's original intention, from which he was dissuaded by friends, to include in *Lord Byron and his Contemporaries* an estimation of his own character. Most fortunately, the fragment was printed and preserved, for, although written at the comparatively early age of forty-four, and ill-suited for its original destination, the frankness and insight which it exhibits are indeed phenomenal. This "estimate" is a confession of unique value, revealing, with extraordinary coolness and discrimination, the inner man :—

AN ATTEMPT OF THE AUTHOR TO ESTIMATE HIS OWN CHARACTER.

"As I have said so much of others, it may be proper that I should be equally explicit with regard to myself. I will be so, and solely on that account. There are some things in this book, which make it proper to show how little I desire to have qualities attributed to me, bad or good, that I do not possess. What I have to say will contain matter which no reputation for candour could render it agreeable to say, and which nothing could induce me to set down, if I did not believe that truth in society were the one thing needful.

“Born of parents of very different temperaments, and after they had undergone great adversity, I believe that my existence has been modified accordingly. I am at once the sickliest and most sanguine of my race, the liveliest and most thoughtful, the most social and the most solitary, the most indolent and the most laborious.

“I am not naturally a teller of truth. Impulse and fancy would tend to make me the reverse ; but I saw the danger of it ; I should admire sincerity, if it were for nothing but the graces of it ; but I have learnt to love it with all my heart and soul, as the only safe ground for humanity to go upon, and the one thing desirable above all others in the moral world. I believe truth to be that, in words, which the discovery of the experimental philosophy has been in science ; and that as the latter will infallibly alter the face of society, and give it the most new, golden, and unhopèd-for opportunities, so the former will be the secret for securing its happiness. I feel certain, that if men could but compare notes to-morrow, and confess to one another their real feelings and desires, society would alter at once, by acclamation.

“I am naturally hasty and jealous ; or rather I was made jealous as I believe others to be, in the common course of education, for I do not believe that unloving interferer with love to be a natural human passion. But I have become jealous for others, more than of them ; and the necessity for great patience has entirely subdued my hastiness : but the power of pleasing, and great indulgence from my friends, have left me a secret store of self-love, by reason of which I find the first smarting of

any wound to my vanity extremely painful to me, so that I have to blush for myself for the very blushing that heats my cheek. But the next minute I philosophise myself quite out of the paroxysm ; and I will affirm, as one of the surest things I know, that nobody can wound my self-love so much as to hinder me from valuing what is good in him, and proclaiming it. Melancholy has done me that kind service, that it has taught me to think too deeply of human nature, to quarrel at heart with any being that belongs to it.

“Revenge I should be too indolent to care about, even if I had not learnt to know it for what it is. I pretend to be above nothing in a proud sense ; but some things I have got remote from, and this is one.

“Early delicacy of temperament, imagination, and a life of letters, accompanied with an improvidence partly occasioned by indolence, partly by animal spirits, and partly by the most singular *missing* of everything like an arithmetical education, have rendered excitement so tempting to me, that were it not for my love of what is graceful, I fear that the necessity for health itself would hardly hinder me from being a drinker, and even a gourmand ; and I confess it is a constant and hard exercise of my philosophy not to eat too much, and make my stomach worse than it is.

“My friends will be surprised to hear this. But I flatter myself they will be more surprised when I tell them (and I suffer inexpressible pain in the telling it) that I am not a courageous man. I feel as if the respect of one sex, and the love of the other, were forsaking me when I say

so ; but they ought not ; and this reflection re-assures me. Yes :—circumstances, known only to myself, have shown me that the organisation I was born with has been weakened, by subsequent cares and demands upon it, into a mortifying destitution of physical courage. In a family of men remarkable for their bravery, I am the only timid person. When I look round upon my brothers I think that the fears of a mother, and the calamities caused by the American War, have deprived me of a part of my birthright. But I have great moral courage. Allow me a pale face and a little reflection ; and as there is scarcely a danger in life which I have not hazarded, so there is none I could not go through with in a good cause.

“ I differ with the world upon some great points of morals and religion. Modern philosophy, and new views for society, have taught me to do so. I know that I could have stood to the last—that I should not have been the first or even the last ‘ faithless friend,’—by the side of an unequivocally good system—good for all, sincere, plain, equable, and fit for eternity. But I cannot and will not be a traitor to the nobler aspirations planted within us, and tending to produce such a system. If the world can be altered, I will not be one to baulk an event so glorious : if it cannot, my endeavours shall be among those that keep it in heart. I have, indeed, something of the Hamlet in me (these speculations are far beyond either modesty or vanity), which makes me sometimes misgive myself, and doubt whether what appears to me best at one time is the same at another.

But I was educated under one system, and learnt to believe in another. I pretend to be exempt from no weaknesses but falsehood, revenge, and implacability; and must take my chance among other strugglers, sure only of good intentions. Oh, were others only sincere, how gladly would I learn of them, instead of teach; and how surely would the world know what is best for it, by the comparisons of their experience!

“It is a singular chance in my history, that I have been led to give a personal account of another man—and that an unfavourable one—when there is nobody less given than myself to tattle and gossip, or who cares less to make a case out for himself at another’s expense. But perhaps the greatest difference between me and any other living writer (with the exception of Mr. Hazlitt) is that I speak all in my own name and at my own risk, whereas the custom is to rail and play the hypocrite in a mask; and none will have been so loud against me on this occasion, as those who have played it most. I have sympathised deeply with almost every pain and pleasure of humanity;—perhaps I might leave out the ‘almost’; for as there is scarcely a pain, bodily or mental, which I have not felt, so I am not aware of one which I have not, at some period or other, apprehended, however foolishly.

“I would not have missed the obligations I have had from my friends, no, hardly to have been exempt from all the cares of money; so little do I hold with that writer, who spoke the other day of ‘the degrading obligations of private friendship.’ I see beyond that. But I do not

the less hold with him, that it is 'comely and sweet' to be able to earn one's own sufficiency. I only think that it should not be made so hard a matter to do so as it very often is, by the systems of society, and the effects which they have in reserve for us even before we are born, and in our very temperaments as well as fortunes; and I think also that the world would have been losers in a very large way,—far beyond what the utilitarians suppose, and yet on their own ground—if certain men of a lively and improvident genius—humanists, of the most persuasive order, had not sometimes left themselves under the necessity of being assisted in a smaller way. But I desire, for my own part, not to be excused in anything, in which I do not take the whole of my fellow-creatures and their errors along with me. Let me not be left out of the pale of humanity, for praise or for blame; and I am content. I desire only to teach and be taught; or if that be too presumptuous a saying, to learn and compare notes. Happy and proud as I am to have been obliged, [I] could have waived even that felicity to have saved myself from the remorse of not having secured something for my children. But this I trust I am now in the way of doing. They have wits of their own, thank God! if I should fail; and they at least have a happy childhood, and learn to have a passion for a liberal justice.

“The rest of my character is to be seen in my writings; from which, for aught I know, the reader may draw a truer picture than I can do of it in all its parts. A clever but dishonourable French critic, who visited this country, and got his notions of some of the Liberal writers from

the tables of the Scotch Tories, has described me as a great sensualist. He is mistaken. I am more candid than others, and perhaps more voluptuous ; but I demand also more refinement in my pleasures, and cannot separate them from sentiment and affection ; and hypocrites take advantage of my candour in this instance, as they do in others. I own I have an extreme sense of the pleasurable, but never unassociated with grace and with the heart ; and I as little partake of some of those abuses of license, which coarse minds and narrow views for society have rendered legitimate, as I do in the face-making with which they are carried on. I have not even a secret from those I love ; no, not one.

“ Let the reader think what a state society must be in, from the surprise which that confession alone will involuntarily create in him.

“ As to my person, I am dark and black-haired, almost as a Creole ; and have nothing to boast of but a gentlemanly carriage and a thoughtful face. Thought alone rescues my face from insignificance ; but I must say it has not the expression, nor the villainous lower jaw, which the engraver in his ‘hurry’ has given it in this book.”

To the last paragraph may be added his son’s description :—

“ He was rather tall, as straight as an arrow, and looked slenderer than he really was. His hair was black and shining, and slightly inclined to wave ; his head was high, his forehead straight and white, his eyes black and sparkling, his general complexion dark.

There was in his whole carriage and manner an extraordinary degree of life."

And Carlyle's:—

"Dark complexion (a trace of the African, I believe); copious, clean, strong, black hair; beautifully-shaped head; fine, beaming, serious, hazel eyes; seriousness and intellect the main expression of the face."

Such were the soul-convictions, and such the outward seeming of the man who, pampered to priggishness in boyhood, and by the malice of political enemies confirmed in his own conceit, was never weary of preaching to his own generation the gospel of tolerance, charity, and good-humour.

In some respects he required, and expected, a lenient judgment towards himself, though his sympathies with graceful, high-spirited vice did not involve the slightest deviation in thought or deed from personal morality. He presents at first sight a baffling combination of weakness and strength, the result, as we have seen, of inherent temperament. He could fight, without a thought of possible consequences, in the school playground, or in the arena of public life, against the two vices he detested—meanness and cruelty; but he never fairly faced his own social responsibilities, or recognised in such matters the importance of the final step from intention to achievement. Troubles, largely of his own making, it is admitted, and his bookworm tastes, made him a trying daily companion, and he was far from an

ideal bread-winner or educator ; but the affections of all who had once loved him, and they were many, seem to have grown stronger with years. They went to him in times of trouble, and their testimony is unvarying in its enthusiasm.

The gallant cheerfulness with which he met real sorrows unfortunately blinded him to the methods of preventing their recurrence ; and he did not realise the practical requirements of his day and generation. He cherished a vague partiality for the old-world literary patron, the cultured aristocrat, at once a friend and master to the needy man of letters. Pending the appearance of this obsolete being, he accepted, without hesitation, from any friend who could afford it, that treacherous means of temporary support, the loan without an expectation of repayment which, had the opportunity arisen, he would have bestowed on others with no ungrudging hand. The perpetual inwardness of his point of view shut him out from the ordinary lessons of experience, producing the charming naïvety and garrulous egoism of his writings, but leading, in private life, to the acceptance of gushing flattery from little men, which often made him ridiculous.

But he exhibited a true genius for friendship, and attracted to himself many spirits nobler and wiser than his own. It is in the reflected light of their memories that his name most surely lives ; but it would be at once ungenerous and unjust to spare no private niche in the temple of fame for one so nearly connected with some of our most precious literary associations, the chosen comrade of those who helped to bring in the dawn of a new

century, who had his influence on their work, recognised and proclaimed its significance, and displayed in his own writings an independent and undeniable originality.

Hunt himself was never deceived concerning the relative importance of his own work and theirs. Complaining of Hallam for having put him "in juxtaposition with eminent men" (Shelley and Keats), "in whose department" he did "not claim to be found, and then dismissed him as not belonging to it," he thus humbles himself (*Tatler*, August 1, 1831):—

"There was scarcely anything in common with any one of us but our affections, our zeal for mankind, and our love of the old poets. Mr. Shelley was a Platonic philosopher of the acutest and loftiest kind, poetizing. He came out of the school (if the word must be used) of Plato and Æschylus. Mr. Keats was a poet of the school of Spenser and Milton—places, indeed, which the third person in question recommended and delighted in, but not in which he had treasured a hopeless attempt at success. That person (if he may be allowed in self-defence to characterise himself at all as a writer of verse) came out of the lower forms of the narrative schools of poetry, of which, perhaps, he might be called a run-away disciple, sentimentalised—to move a tear with a verse is the highest poetical triumph he can boast of. Generally speaking, he is something between poetry and prose, a compound of the love and wit of nature."

As usual his unerring instinct strikes the key-note. He was poet, critic, essayist, and politician—sentimentalised. The affection for suburban detail, which limited his genuine nature-worship, may be recognised in his attitude towards life and art. He loved men more than man, and beautiful lines or phrases above

great books. In every direction his judgment was led by sprightly feeling in submission to certain moral principles.

By energy and fearless loyalty, involving the endurance of something like martyrdom, he achieved a solid service to the cause of Liberalism in one of its darkest periods ; by persistent faithfulness to the " old masters " in literature he materially assisted, though to some extent on lines of his own, the popularisation of taste and information, which may be said to have begun in his age ; and by the exercise of independent critical judgment he encouraged new leaders. Gratitude, therefore, should teach us to forgive the undeniable shallowness of his intellect, and the serious faults in style, which are too frequently the result of his habitual indifference to the formal conventions. He may gain our affections, as he did those of his contemporaries, by the winning personality, so far removed from the strenuousness of to-day, that pervades every line he wrote, and finds its supreme utterance in a few admirable verses, many felicitous *appreciations*, and certain studies in the humorous-pathetic that defy definition.

As I have said elsewhere, " his nature was essentially romantic. His thoughts kept company with brave knights and fair ladies, wandering in beautiful gardens and exchanging tender compliments. The ceremonies and customs that had grown archaic in the world of action retained their full significance in his imagination, and it was upon them that he delighted to dwell . . .

" His writings are the expression of his moral nature.

They are genial, sympathetic, and chivalrous like himself; revealing the main motive of his life—the desire to increase the happiness of mankind. They seem to echo the ever-memorable petition of *Abou Ben Adhem*—

‘ I pray thee then
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men.’ ”

THE END.

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